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In the savage tradition of *The Godfather*, a tough, non-stop action tale of Mafia men, their women, and their never-ending nightmare of violence

Brothers In Blood

P.D. Ballard

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BROTHERS IN BLOOD

Above a woman screamed.

Zazio went up three steps at a time, taking a ball of thin, oiled nylon cord, very strong stuff, from his pocket. He found the woman standing naked in the upper hall, hands against her face, drawing breath for another scream. He was on her before she could get it out, snubbing the cord around her neck, behind her arms, and twisting the length around the flesh of his hand to tighten it.

The woman choked but terror gave her strength and she fought. That helped to kill her. The flailing arms, the turning and tearing to get away made the cord cut into her neck more quickly. She quit fighting, her body arched back stiffly, then fell slack as all her muscles relaxed. Zazio dropped her and jumped back to be clear of excrement that was released, then hauled her by the cord to the stairs and dumped her down. Horrid odor filled the hall.
Zazio gave it no attention.

In the thundering tradition of *The Godfather*

THE DON IS DEAD Nick Quarry
WAR OF THE DONS Peter Rabe
THE TAKEOVER Richard Wormser
IN THE HOUR BEFORE MIDNIGHT Jack Higgins

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Brothers in Blood

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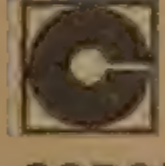

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Brothers In Blood

one

FOR THE LAST HOUR Jason Dearborne, in a trance of boredom, had been answering the questions of the solemn-faced reporters. The interview was the PR department's baby, and anything of interest to the business world concerning him could have been distributed in a printed résumé more efficiently than by this personal appearance they had insisted on. It was, they rationalized, his debut into the rarefied strata of upper management. It would make good copy. Good copy meant valuable advertising for the firm, which was already a household name, Conglomerated Stores. The newsmen wanted a look at him, even though everybody conceded that he would say nothing to rock the financial community. So he was cooperating. They had gone through the sparring of trying to jar something really newsworthy out of him. They were now down to the American Dream, the public's preoccupation with those mysterious steps by which Boy Makes Good.

The gray man from the *Wall Street Journal* intoned, "Six years ago when you graduated from Harvard did you foresee that in so short a time you would rise to the presidency of the country's largest chain of markets and discount houses before you were thirty years old?" and thought he was rewarded with a rather glazed look and a faint frown from the young president.

Jason Dearborne brought his eyes back from Edy Howe where she sat in the far corner behind the reporters, sleek and tantalizing, and mouthing atrociously vulgar and intimate words designed to rattle him.

"Farthest thing from my mind," he said to the gray man, but his words were aimed at Edy.

Edy grinned. The man nodded approval. "Did you go directly from school to work for Clarence Howe? For the Big C stores?"

"No, I didn't," Jason said. "My first job was with Meyer and Meyer in Denver . . . the accountants."

The gray head approved again. "One of the best firms of its kind. You came up through accounting then. Will you tell us how you . . . ah . . . made the change?"

Dearborne smiled. "You're asking if I was fired? I was not."

The man from *Time* was getting restless, impatient with the tedious probing. They would be here all day at this rate, pulling out answers like impacted teeth. Besides, the new girl reporter from Newark looked bored—she was fishing out a compact mirror and playing with a strand of hair at her ear—and if so, she would be hard to get along with on their date afterward.

"Mr. Dearborne." He sounded too aggressive and toned it down some. "Will you tell us in your own words, where was the springboard? What was the big jump? How did you pull it off? I'd like to get at the Horatio Alger angle."

The girl from Newark sat in line between Jason and Edy Howe. Edy was still making faces, and there was that mirror, able to pick them up and turn this interview into a source of speculations that the PR boys might find lively publicity but that he personally could do without. Jason sat forward eagerly.

"Fine . . . fine. Yes. I'd like that. It's a good illustration of how opportunity and luck help each other . . . I was very uncertain in the first weeks with Meyer and Meyer. . . . Actually, I was scared blue . . ."

He smiled directly at her as Newark turned back to hear the confession. Now if he could just hold her attention, keep her mind off Edy, if indeed it was Edy the mirror had been inspecting.

"It took me some weeks to get beyond the feeling that someone was looking over my shoulder," and that injudicious little phrase brought the ghost of a sly, satisfied smirk from Newark. He cursed Edy silently and went on with the story.

"Then when I'd settled down I was sent out on the job of auditing the books of the Jim Dandy Stores in Denver, a young chain run by an uncle and two nephews. They had been all right with their original three stores, each run by one of the family, but they'd tried to grow too fast, had tried to build up a credit with the wholesalers and banks, and gotten into deep trouble. They were losing money fast and would soon have to declare bankruptcy. Their main difficulty was they were not yet big enough to buy in sufficient quantity to receive a price break that would let them compete with the really big chains. I talked to the family and told them the only way out was to sell to a big corporation or merge with one. They said they had tried and couldn't find anyone out there who would touch them and asked if I would look for a buyer. I didn't know much better than they did where to turn but I thought what the hell, they were sunk if something wasn't done, so I came east to see if I could interest Conglomerated."

Newark interrupted brightly. "You knew the Howe family previously?"

Jason Dearborne let the inference pass. "No, miss. One of my professors at the Business School had preached that in selling we should start at the top and work down, and Conglomerated was the top. I sent in my card and asked for an appointment. I guess the name Meyer and Meyer was enough to get me in, and Mr. Howe was very courteous."

The *Wall Street Journal* reporter looked to the grizzled gnome sitting next to Jason. "So, Mr. Howe, it was on Mr. Dearborne's recommendation that you bought the Jim Dandy Stores five years ago?"

Clarence Howe winked up broadly at his protégé and nudged him with a sharp elbow. "I bought Jason here. On the strength of the pitch he made. Had to take the stores to get him. I told him I'd buy the stores if he'd go in as local manager."

The gray man sounded mildly incredulous. "Even though he was inexperienced in food merchandizing?"

"He knew cost accounting; that was more important. Anybody can learn to buy and sell food."

Then Newark was in again, purring, "And why did you decide to make him president of the Big C chain? When did you?"

Howe slapped possessively at Jason's arm. "That first morning I talked to him. He just needed a little seasoning."

Across the room Edy stretched her left arm and laid a finger on the wristwatch there, her lips framing the words, "Knock it off." Dearborne called a halt to the interview, pleading another appointment, and got to his feet. Clarence Howe rose beside him. As the reporters left, Dearborne followed them, angling toward Edy to reach her after they had gone. But the girl from Newark turned aside and reached Edy before him. He heard her question.

"Mrs. Bullock, was your grandfather's choice of a new president a surprise to you or have you known for long that it was coming?"

Edy, standing, looked down on the shorter girl, showing amusement. "You mean, am I keeping him? No, he got the job on his own."

Newark started but she did not back down. "You are direct." She laughed a little. "But you do know him personally? Does his promotion please you? Or aren't you interested in the business?"

"Yes, I'm interested." Edy's tone was light and easy. "Now that he's a success I am marrying him."

"Oh? I didn't understand that you were divorced."

"I'm not," Edy said.

Jason Dearborne arrived then, fighting temper and saying stiffly, "If you will excuse us now . . . the interview is over."

"Thank you, Mr. Dearborne. Thank you, Mrs. Bullock," Newark said cheerfully and left—very pleased with her scoop, both the printable and unprintable—to keep her date with the man from *Time*.

Edy was laughing aloud even before the door closed and Jason leveled a shaking finger at her.

"What the hell were you trying to do back here with all that crazy pantomime?" He shook the finger at the door. "That woman had a mirror; she was lip-reading you."

Edy lifted an elegant shoulder. "So she knows some words I know. I wanted to loosen you up some. My God, you were stuffy up there, the very picture of a bloody boring accountant."

Clarence Howe arrived for the last words, took in Jason's flustered scowl, and raised his brows. "Seems to me I missed out on something. What's the excitement?"

"Your granddaughter is a spoiled brat who ought to be upended and spanked red."

"That's not news." The old man chuckled. "You're going to have your hands full, boy, I hope you're up to it."

The girl laughed at both of them. "We can start making each other over as soon as I get back from Vegas. That is if you get me to Kennedy in time to catch the plane."

"I ought," Jason said, "to make you take the bus."

"But my suitcases are already in your car," she said, kissed her grandfather, and looped a hand around Jason's arm. "Mind Jason's stores good now, Howie, until he gets back to take care of them himself."

"If you don't spank her, I will," Howe threatened, and pushed both of them toward the door.

They rode the elevator the thirty stories to the basement garage, got into the car, and turned it onto the Avenue of the Americas, neither of them saying anything. Without his intending it and spurred by his upset over the turn of the interview, Jason's mind took leave of the girl's presence and ranged in some wonder back over the six months he had known her and the series of developments that had marched him step after step to this day. She was unrecognizable now as the girl he had met, except in her incorrigible impudence. That was unchanged.

He had driven his rented car toward his first visit to Howe's Westchester estate, up the long, winding driveway, very impressed by the gentle, rolling, heavily timbered hillsides, and the big house just coming into sight low on the crest of the grassy dome above the small lake. Suddenly a horse had jumped out from a bridle path hidden by shrubbery, the rider yanking it to a rearing stop only inches

from his front fender. The big chestnut danced and weaved, backing, fighting the reins until the rider got it quieted. Jason had stalled the car in his fast stop to avoid the animal and he sat tensed, afraid the rider would be thrown.

He saw a floppy, shapeless hat, hair cut too short for the day's young people, an outsize plaid shirt, tight and faded jeans, and bare, dirty feet in the stirrups. He thought it was a reckless teen-age boy and decided against giving him the satisfaction of appearing shaken. He bent to start the car. It ground sluggishly but did not catch.

"You flooded it."

It was a girl's voice, and he looked again. She had the horse under control and sat watching him, appraising.

"Thanks for telling me. You nearly killed your horse, jumping in the road that way."

She did not like being told so and thanked him with a crooked smile. And changed the subject.

"You must be Howie's boy from Denver. Jason Dearborne, isn't it? But Howie conned me. He said you were handsome."

Dearborne was not handsome, his jaw a little too long and the bone structure of his thin face a little too evident, giving him an eager, hungry look.

"Sorry," he said flatly. He did not know what connection she had with Clarence Howe, but he did not intend to be baited. He tried the car again. Over the growling of the starter she said, "He said you were young, too. How old are you?"

"Twenty-eight."

"Well . . . under thirty, but pushing it. Still that's pretty young for the job. Do you want me to start the car for you? Howie gets uptight when any of his little minions keep him waiting. . . ."

The motor caught and he gunned it briefly to clear the line.

"In the nick of time," she said. "Go along now, little minion, drag ass."

Dearborne put the car in gear and drove sedately on. Watching the rearview mirror he saw that she hastily

kicked the horse on across the road and vanished among the trees.

He saw her next three hours later, while Clarence Howe and he were finishing their second cocktail before dinner. She walked into the library, now wearing a simple, white, opaque dress which nevertheless suggested that there were no under garments. Her legs were still bare, but her feet were washed and in sandals, and the short blond hair was covered by a shoulder-length wig. Dearborne stood up when she entered. Howe did not.

"My granddaughter, Mrs. Bullock." He waved his glass in her direction. "Edy, this is my new administrative assistant, Mr. Dearborne."

The girl did not offer her hand but looked up at him with a bold directness. Jason and I met awhile ago, but he may not recognize me."

Dearborne said, "The red hair does make a difference."

She touched the wig, made a slow model's pirouette, and batted long lashes at him. "And you prefer it?"

Seeing her this close, he noticed something that he had not seen before. The eyes were tan rather than brown, with highlights in them like flaked gold. *Cat's eyes.* The phrase flashed through Dearborne's mind as Howe grumped, "Don't parade your wares here, girl. I need this boy and I don't want him upset about the likes of you. He knows where he's going and he knows he doesn't have to marry the boss's granddaughter to get there."

She wrinkled her nose at him and sashayed to the bar, made herself a double martini, and watched Dearborne over the rim of the glass with a cat's fixed stare. But during dinner she was quiet, and as soon as they were finished she excused herself and left the house. Outside, a car's deep-throated engine roared, the sweep of headlights threw the curving drive into harsh relief, and then she was gone.

A houseman poured brandy into two snifters and Clarence Howe slumped in his chair, warming the glass between both hands. He appeared smaller than when Dearborne had met him orginally, smaller even than he had seemed before dinner, a shrunken figure with a round

head pink and bare except for a spotty fringe above his ears, so fine the hair looked like silk.

"God only knows what I've done to her."

Howe spoke in a sighing voice, so low that Dearborne could not tell whether the words were intended for him to hear until the old man went on, louder, with a querulous impatience.

"What the devil is an old fogy like me supposed to know about raising a teen-aged girl? You see . . . her daddy was killed in Korea and I sent for Edy and her mother to come to me. They were in San Diego. Edy arrived with a name tag and an address tied around her neck and the mother disappeared. She'd taken up with a chief petty officer. I hadn't counted on that. . . . I never liked her much, but I figured she'd want a piece of my money enough to come. I guess, though, there was something she wanted more . . . and she did something to Edy, walking out that way. . . ."

Dearborne poured himself another brandy to cover his embarrassment. He did not know Howe well enough to expect such confidences. He was a business acquaintance only, and he resented being made the target of these revelations that Howe might very well regret having made later on. It could in fact have an adverse effect on their relationship. He tried to stop it, saying quietly, "She seems an intelligent girl. I'm sure as she gets older she'll understand how it could happen."

The old man was not to be put off. He might not even have heard. "Edy decided she was no good herself, wouldn't ever be any good. She was a rebel. Bit her governess, ran away from ten different schools, got to college and jumped into the middle of all the riots. Oh." He looked up and saw the frown as Dearborne concentrated on his glass. "Reason I'm telling you this is because you'll be falling over her from time to time and I want you to understand. Well . . . she went to Columbia and met this Bullock character. At least they got married—that's better than some of the kids are doing—and while I couldn't stand the bastard, Edy seemed happier than at any time

since she came here. Then he burned his draft card and took off for Canada without even telling her he was going."

Somewhat relieved, Dearborne permitted himself a sympathetic grunt, which again Howe took no notice of. He had more to say and bore steadily on.

"That turned Edy around, but not in a way I like to see. She cut her long hair short and took to wearing dresses except when she was alone or at home. She threw out her old revolutionary crowd and began going with the boys from the country club here, scorching one after the other. It's like she hates everybody, wants to hurt. I'm sorry for her but I don't know how to help her. And you'll be a damned fool if you get mixed up with her."

That was the first of many weekends at the Westchester place. Howe bought Dearborne a membership in the country club, and as the months lengthened, Jason began to get the impression that, contrary to his warning, the old man was hopeful he and Edy would make a match. Or perhaps the warning had been intended to whet his interest, an attempt at reverse psychology. For Jason it was not working. He did not like sarcastic women and Edy Bullock had a bitter tongue. As much as possible he stayed out of her way.

Then one evening the buzzer of his Park Avenue South apartment sounded, and when he opened the door, there she was.

He did not try to hide his surprise. His experience with women was slight, and he did not trust what he did know of them. There had been a girl in Denver, a secretary at the Meyer and Meyer headquarters, with whom he had had a desultory affair that faded when she discovered he did not mean to marry her. Before that he had thought he was in love with a waitress in a Cambridge restaurant until he found her with two other men. So he stammered when he recovered enough to say, "Won't you come in?"

"I wondered when you were going to ask me."

He still had not moved out of the way and she put a hand against his chest, pushing until he gave ground. Then

she went past him, turned full around to look over the room, and grimaced.

"Ugh," she said.

He fumbled, found a cigarette, found nothing to say, wondering what the devil she was doing there.

She stepped back and swung the door closed, saying, "Not your furniture, I hope?"

He knew that he sounded strangled and coughed to disguise it. "I'm subleasing, week to week. I don't know how much longer your grandfather wants to keep me here in the east."

Whether her incredulity was genuine he could not tell as her voice rose. "You mean you haven't heard?"

"I thought I was clear enough."

"Oh, for God's sake, that miserable old goat! He's at it again. I've known for weeks. He's moving up to board chairman . . . Howie, that is . . . waiting for next month's board meeting to have you elected president. He really didn't tell you?"

His mouth dropped open. He could only gape at her and shake his head.

"*And* chief executive officer," she snorted. "I heard him tell Haymark that he thought it was a cheat the way some men move up but still hang onto the reins of a company. Oh sure, he'll turn over the reins to you, but. . . ."

He did not register the rest of what she was saying. The word *president* held him spellbound. President at his age? Of Conglomerated Stores? It was unreal. Was that why Howe had brought him east? To familiarize him with everything that went on at headquarters? He had felt honored enough with the post of administrative assistant, and in the table of organization he was ranked by half a dozen vice-presidents. He was being vaulted over all of them?

Suspicion doused him like a bucket of ice water. This was a trick of hers. She was putting him on, the way he had watched her play with other men at country club dances, building them up and then cutting them down, getting even with the hippie husband who had abandoned her. He cursed himself for having let her gull him, then he yanked the door open, caught her arm, and started to

shove her out. But she was fast, snagging a foot behind his leg, grabbing a handful of his shirt and hanging on.

"Wait a minute . . . wait a minute. Don't blow your cool. I'm not kidding. It's true. That old fool just likes to play God too much."

He shook her off and stood back, bewildered and still angry, and snapped at her, slamming the door.

"Keep your mouth off Clarence Howe. He does more for his people than any corporate head I ever heard of, and he gets precious little appreciation from you. If you hate him so much, why don't you go off somewhere? You're a big girl. Now what's the president poppycock about?"

She snapped back at him. "I said it was true. It is." Then slowly, dropping her head as though in thought, walking to the couch and sinking onto it, "And I don't hate Howie."

"You put on a pretty good show of it." But he was less harsh, and took the chair opposite her. "Tell me, what's it all about with you?"

For a moment she sat still, then abruptly bobbed her head. "I guess I will. I don't hate him, but when I first came he said some pretty lousy things about my mother. I didn't need that right then, and at least she had the guts to turn down his charity and cut out on her own. I wish I knew what she's really like . . . I've never heard from her since the day she put me on that plane."

"Must have been pretty confusing and lonely for you at first."

"Still is, lonely. I never could talk to Howie, make him understand why I kept being kicked out of schools. There were all those nice-nice girls with their proper families and I couldn't say a word about my mother. I didn't belong and I was fighting back, to be somebody in my own right. I thought I had it made with Ed Bullock, until he ran out. Then I saw what a sham everything is. The only thing for real is sex. He was good there, I'll say that for him." Her eyes had been on her hands, lying in her lap. She raised them in one of those direct stares that he had found were her habit. "Are you any good, Jason?"

He had come to expect the unexpected from her and to keep his guard up. He answered as offhandedly as he could manage, "I haven't had many complaints."

"Well, let's find out for sure." She got up as she spoke and headed for the bedroom, peeling her dress over her head on her way.

There was nothing underneath it except panty hose, and she was shucking them off by the time he recovered himself enough to get on his feet and reach the doorway.

This one he had not foreseen, had not ducked, and he was nicely trapped. If he refused her, he knew she would hold it over his head forever after and she could make life damned uncomfortable, but if he took her. . . . She was Clarence Howe's granddaughter, and he could not guess what the old man's reaction would be when she told him. He had not the slightest doubt that she would tell him, whichever way he opted.

She had a ripe, warm body. Perhaps that decided him. He told himself that he was simply not going to let her get away with this game of one-upmanship. Without saying anything he took off his clothes, threw back the bedcovers, then pulled her into his arms.

He teased her long enough, keeping his own reaction back, until at last she begged, and he had that little victory, that small mastery over her before he committed himself. He even drew from her something as near to a compliment as she had ever paid in his hearing when, later, she told him, "Well . . . you can learn. That's good enough for starters."

From her side of the car Edy said in a small voice, "All right, I apologize about the press conference. You outwaited me."

He snapped back to the present with a start, blinking at the traffic that filled the expressway. He had no memory of driving after leaving the tunnel.

"Okay," he said. "I wasn't thinking about that though."

"Well, you were miles away. You haven't said a word."

He grinned at her. "I was thinking about that first night

in my apartment when you came to tell me I was to be president."

"That was only incidental. I really came to find out whether I wanted to marry you. I knew that was what Howie wanted and I could tell by the way you acted that you didn't have too much experience with women."

"So I didn't have a thing to say about it?"

"Not a thing." She was blatantly smug.

She had begun by spending occasional nights in his apartment and he had been profoundly surprised when she announced that she was going to marry him. Surprised and disturbed. It wasn't that he disliked the idea of being married to her—in fact, it was rather appealing because he was still lonely in the strange city—but there had been a nagging doubt at the back of his mind. He had never been in love nor truly very concerned with sex. It could be that he had been born undersexed, that that accounted for his self-acknowledged absorption with his business life. Still, he wanted the companionship of a marriage and this one would have obvious advantages. As a member of the Howe family, as president of the Howe empire, all of his loyalties would be focused in one neat package. He had summed it up that way for her and laughed at himself, saying, "It's an ideal setup in an accountant-type mind. But why do you want to marry me?" And she had answered, "For part of the same reason, and I want something of my own and you're as good a catch as I'm likely to find."

At the airport he helped the skycap get her bags from the rear seat, then went to park the car while she checked in. Afterward they had two drinks in the Captain's Lounge before her plane was called. He saw her off, watched the big jet taxi toward the runway, and went back to the car whistling, looking forward to a satisfying if not an exhilarating future.

For the next three weeks he had no time to be lonely for her, there was too much to do in getting acquainted with his new job. As administrative assistant he had thought he knew all about it, but he found there was a different perspective from the top post. And Edy phoned him every

night, to make certain, she said, that he stayed out of strange beds. Clarence Howe claimed a lot of his free time; Howe insisted that all work and no play and so forth . . . and called Dearborne out to play golf at the club, even riding around the course in a cart to see that he took the required exercise.

He was on his way home from one of these excursions, the car radio tuned to the New York *Times* music station which was at the hourly news break, when the report was interrupted for a flash.

"It has just been learned," the newsman said without excitement, "that Mr. Forbes Adams was shot and killed moments ago as he crossed the parking lot of the Jersey City warehouse of Conglomerated Stores. Mr. Adams, who lived at two-ten Mannering Drive in Cedar Grove, was chief purchasing agent for the Big C. At the time of the shooting he was accompanied by his assistant, Mr. Dan Hawley. According to Mr. Hawley's story, as Mr. Adams approached his car a gunman fired from the car in the next parking space, hitting Mr. Adams in the throat, and then drove off. Mr. Hawley instinctively dropped, but no second shot was fired. Mr. Hawley did not see the gunman's face but he gave police a description of the car. By the time warehouse guards reached the main gate there was no sign of the killer. Mr. Adams died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital."

Adams was not a personal friend, but Jason Dearborne had met him on visits to the warehouse. The murder gave his stomach a queasy sensation. He debated what to do. It was now after six o'clock and the warehouse with its district offices would be closed. The news flash had given Adams' home address, but he was not familiar enough with New Jersey to know where it was. Better, he thought, to keep out of it tonight. He did not even know whether the buyer had a family.

Dan Hawley had been Adams' assistant and had been with Adams at the time of the shooting. Hawley would undoubtedly have things well in hand.

By the time he got home to his apartment, however, Jason had had second thoughts, and knowing by now that Clarence Howe was like a hen with a brood of chicks

about his department heads, he phoned Westchester. The houseman there told him Howe was on the way to New Jersey.

two

VITO (THE BATMAN) CONTINO was professionally pleased with himself. He was a professional. The hit had been professional, clean. No one had got a close enough look to identify him. It was one more cause for him to take pride in his work.

His nickname did not relate to the comic book character, but to his acknowledged proficiency at breaking arms and legs with a baseball bat, only one of his talents. Johnny Dee used him for most of the tough nuts who insisted on trying to welch on their debts. Every good shylock needed trustworthy collectors, and Contino knew that he was one of the best.

He drove deliberately out of the Big C warehouse parking lot, turned sedately right onto Burton, then left on Fourteenth, and shortly parked the heap in the driveway of an abandoned service station. His getaway car was around the block. He left the gun in the glove compartment, opened the door and stepped out . . . into the sweeping glare of headlights as a prowl car cruised around the corner. He began to walk away without hurry but the police car slowed alongside him and the driver called to him to stop. They had surely seen him close the door. Contino lost his head. He began to run. If he could get around the side of the building there was an alley. He could make it.

The cop shouted at him, then, just before Contino could make his turn, fired.

The policeman said afterward that he had meant it as a warning shot, yet the bullet caught Contino in the back of the head and he was dead before he hit the sidewalk. A second cruiser nosed in toward the first while the man there was still reporting to the station. Contino's car was on the stolen list. They found the gun in the glove compartment, but ballistics did not link it with the Adams murder until forty-eight hours later.

The Adams killing was only the lastest chapter in a nightmare for Larry Wade that had begun on the golf links in Las Vegas, Nevada, nearly a year ago. At that time he had found himself paired with a New York attorney named Julio Pugaliese, Jr.

Wade did not know that the pairing was other than accidental, that in fact Pugaliese had paid a tournament committee member to see that their names were drawn together. All he knew about the man after the first eighteen holes was that he had an office on Madison Avenue in New York City and loved to play in these pro-am foursomes around the country.

They were close to the same age, they had lived within a few miles of each other during their childhood, but Wade had never to his knowledge seen Pugaliese before.

Larry Wade was a blond giant who had been an outstanding Ivy League end, was now in his middle twenties, unmarried, a playboy with champagne tastes and an inborn disinclination for work. Thus far he had not needed to put forth much effort. With his cousin he had inherited a small soap factory in Delaware County, New York that gave him a reasonable income but was still rather tight for his preferred style of living. So it was tantalizing later, in the Nineteenth Hole, to listen to Julio Pugalicse spin out a rambling story about a man who had a quarter of a million dollars' worth of stolen bonds and did not know what to do with them. Pugaliese found the predicament hilariously funny.

Pugaliese was just as big as Wade but dark where Wade was fair, his hair black, his features somewhat heavy, and

he had a quick, contagious laugh. He had been educated at a small Catholic college, then gone on to Columbia.

"It kills me, the things I run into," he said. "The man comes to my office and beats around the bush so much I know he's afraid I'll yell copper." He paused, shaking his head, chuckling, then sipped his drink.

The way he put it made Larry Wade lift an eyebrow and ask, "Didn't you? Tell the police?"

"Why?" Pugaliese's eyes were merry. "Those bonds came from one of the big brokerage houses and the guys on the Street are so mixed up they don't know what their names are. The bonds are coupon, not registered. Take them to Europe, feed them to a foreign bank, when they come back here they're as clean as cash."

Puzzled, Larry Wade said, "But how do you do that?"

Pugaliese shrugged one shoulder in deprecation of the difficulty of such a transaction. "You know a man. You know the ropes. It's easy."

With almost raw jealousy Larry Wade muttered that he hoped the holder of the bonds was sufficiently appreciative of Pugaliese's help, and Pulgaliese's wide grin bared all of his large white teeth.

"Do I look like a sucker, I should tell him? He's hungry, wants quick cash. He'll sell the lot for fifty grand, and I can get two hundred thousand for it in Switzerland. But the joke's on me after all. I've only got twenty-five thousand to play with. That's the way it goes sometimes, you get on a good thing and you can't cash it out."

Wade nodded understandingly and said nothing and they talked a little longer about golf before they separated. Wade had the beginning of an idea. He thought about it all night and the next day as they played the second eighteen holes. He waited until they were alone, walking toward the clubhouse, before he said idly, "How long would you need the money? I mean, how quickly could you realize on those bonds in Europe?"

"Huh?" Julio looked at him vacantly for a moment, then said, "Oh, the ones I told you about yesterday? Well, say a week, two weeks. Why?"

"Maybe," Larry told him, "I could find the second twenty-five thousand . . ."

Pugaliese stopped, blinking at the fair man as if he were sent from heaven, then he made an embarrassed cough.

"I guess I talk too much. What do I know about you? I could get in a lot of trouble if the word went around that I had anything to do with it. I could even be disbarred. Sorry."

"I don't know anything about you either," Larry said. "But if we were in it together, anything I could say would hurt me too, wouldn't it?"

He found himself pressing, trying to sell this stranger on letting him in on this deal that promised such a tempting profit, and apparently he was sufficiently persuasive. By the time they had finished dinner the agreement was made and they shook hands on it. Each would put up twenty-five thousand to buy the bonds. They would sell them in Europe and split two hundred thousand. It was as simple as that.

Larry himself did not have twenty-five thousand, but he did not worry. He was certain that his cousin and he could borrow it from their bank. He arranged to meet Pugaliese and the man who held the bonds in a midtown Manhattan hotel the following week. Then he flew home to talk to his cousin Frank.

Frank Wade was ten years Larry's senior and was the one who stayed home and ran the business while Larry made the pretense of publicizing their product by following the tournament circuit. While Frank was grateful that Larry generally left him alone to manage the operation, he resented the uneven division of ownership. Fifty years before, when the Wade Brothers' Soap Company had been put together it had been Larry's father who had the capital, Frank's father the know-how, and it had been split two thirds to one. Larry had inherited the two thirds. Frank had tried several times to buy enough stock from Larry to make it a fifty-fifty split, but Larry held off, wanting the extra income that would eventually amount to more than the lump sum Frank could offer.

He listened to Larry's new proposition aghast, heard him through and then said, "You have to be out of your mind. What happens when you're caught?"

Larry was impatient. "How are we going to get caught,

you jerk? Julio has it all set up. We fly to Miami, hop to the British islands, and fly to Switzerland. We'll be back in two weeks at the outside. Think, man, we put up twenty-five gees to turn a seventy-five thousand profit. What's wrong with that?"

"It's outright stealing, is what. I won't have anything to do with it."

"Chicken," Larry fumed, said nothing more to Frank and went alone to the bank.

He borrowed the money against his shares in the soap company, met Pugaliese in the hotel room with a very nervous man who presented the bonds for their examination. They watched the bonds sealed in a brown envelope, paid the fifty thousand, and carried the envelope to Julio's office. Gloating, they opened the envelope to admire their prize and found it stuffed with blank paper.

"Why, damn him," Julio raged. "The bastard pulled a switch of envelopes. I don't know how. I was watching him every minute."

Immediately he phoned the hotel and was told their man had checked out.

"Jesus," said Julio and wiped his sweating forehead. "Jesus. My twenty-five grand . . out the window."

"Your twenty-five . . . ?" Larry sounded strangled. "At least it was yours. I borrowed mine, and unless I can raise it in thirty days the damn bank will sell my factory stock out from under me."

In desperation he approached Frank again, asking for a personal loan or an advance against the next money due him. He was a fool, Frank told him, and added that he had warned Larry not to get involved, said that collections were very slow, the plant running only part time, he couldn't make the loan even if he wanted to, and wound up bitterly with an accusation that if Larry paid more attention to the business and forgot golf tournaments they would be in better shape. His advice was that Larry go to the police.

That was the last thing Larry intended doing. Besides the risk to himself in admitting that he had tried to buy stolen bonds, there was Julio to consider, Julio who thought that with all his contacts in the financial world he

had a chance of finding the thief, given time. But in three weeks Julio had learned nothing and Larry had not found a way to redeem his stock.

It was then that Johnny Dee introduced himself. Johnny was a short, very fat, ugly man who said he ran a sales agency and that his attorney, Larry's friend Julio Pugaliese, had told him of the difficulty they were both in, and offered help. In exchange for some help he himself needed.

Dee said he had a sales connection with the Big C Stores, selling them olive oil. He knew they were looking for a source of soap powder to be packaged under the Big C brand name and he wanted a participation in that deal. If Larry would guarantee Dee control of Wade Brothers' total output, he would put up the money for the stock redemption and hold the stock himself as collateral until Larry could repay him. He would require a twenty-five percent commission on the soap sales, but since he could triple their present market Wade Brothers would be far ahead in the long run.

Again Larry went to Frank, feeling that he was saved from the brink and was also bringing in a fine stroke of business, but again Frank balked.

"You'd be trading your mortgage to the bank for a mortgage to somebody we don't know anything about. Suppose he foreclosed on the loan? He'd have two thirds of the company and I wouldn't have any control over whatever he might want to do."

Furiously Larry argued. "The bank will sell me out anyway, to someone we don't know. What's the difference? And why should Dee foreclose? He runs a sales agency, he doesn't know anything about making soap and cares less. And look . . . he says Big C will take all we can make, we won't have to break our necks trying to market the stuff and it will simplify the packaging. Big C will furnish the boxes already printed with their labels. Look alive, Frank, this will make us. It's the luckiest thing that could happen to us."

"I still don't like it," Frank said. "Twenty-five percent for selling? Hell, this Dee will make more than we do, figuring costs to us."

"We can shave on quality, we can save on mass production. Come on, Frank, get with it. If you can't see a main chance like this you oughtn't to be running the operation, and I'd better bring in somebody who can."

Frank Wade was appalled. After all the years he had fought to keep the company afloat, this threat to unseat him was beyond belief. And yet Larry had the power to do it and in his present frame of mind probably would.

"All right," he surrendered. "You're the boss."

Larry Wade was not generous in his victory. "Damn right I'm the boss," he said, "and from now on I'm going to have a bigger say around here to keep things humming."

To prove his new commitment to management, Larry surpervised the submission of samples as required by Conglomerated Stores. He sent over a quantity of their soap as it had always been made. And despite his reservations, Frank was more hopeful when a signed contract with the big chain arrived.

They had always struggled to keep a place in a field dominated by three huge companies, but now maybe they were on their way. The initial order was for a hundred thousand one-pound boxes, fifty thousand two-pound boxes, and twenty-five thousand three-pound boxes. The boxes arrived already printed.

Frank hired more labor and put the plant on a twenty-four-hour-a-day schedule as the only way he could meet that quota. And the quality was downgraded enough to increase their profit margin.

For lack of warehouse space the order was being delivered in sections. The first half had gone out and the second was almost ready for delivery, the Big C boxes stacked high, filling the limited area, when a letter came to Frank from Conglomerated Stores. It invoked an escape clause in the contract that specified the merchandise must meet the minimum-quality standard of their testing department and said tersely that the first soap delivered did not match the earlier samples and did not meet the minimum standard. The contract was thereby invalidated.

Reading it, Frank Wade felt a sickness fill him. In his

mind he saw the crammed warehouse, the printed Big C cartons there, the stuff unsalable anywhere else unless it was repackaged. It was ruin, pure and simple. He sat at his desk without the strength to stand up until he heard Larry arrive, whistling down the hall. The big blond man came through the door swinging the putter that he carried everywhere. Frank said nothing but heavily turned the letter around and shoved it across the desk.

Larry scissored the paper up between his index and third fingers, noted the letterhead, read it, and slammed it down, swearing.

"The goddamned bastards. They already okayed those samples. They can't do this. We'll take them to court."

Frank said bitterly, "You're the smart aleck who insisted I cut the quality. The samples weren't the same stuff as the product is now. So you tell me what we do with a hundred thousand pounds of soap in Big C boxes that nobody will touch when word gets around."

For a long moment they glared at each other, then Larry lunged to grab at the phone and put in a call. It had irked him some that it was almost impossible to reach Johnny Dee at the D & D sales agency located in a two-room former real estate office, but that he could usually be found at The Tavern out on Route Twenty-two after eleven o'clock in the morning. Larry had met him there twice where he sat at a lone table against the west wall with a telephone under his feet.

The fat man's thick voice wheezed through the earpiece and Larry shouted at him.

"This is Wade . . . I thought you had the Big C purchasing department in your vest pocket . . ."

Johnny sounded as if he had emphysema. "What's the matter, kid?"

"Nothing," Larry still shouted. "Nothing at all. Except we've got a warehouse full of soap packaged and they've just canceled the contract."

The voice tightened. "Canceled for why?"

Larry nearly strangled, reading the letter into the phone. There was a silence along the wire, then Dee rattled the diaphram.

"You dumb chump. Did you cut that formula?"

"We had to to break our nut. They have to take that soap."

Johnny Dee was quiet again. After a moment he sighed in exasperation and asked who had signed the letter.

"A guy named Forbes Adams, purchasing agent."

Dee had done it before, put on an act of cryptic, truncated phrasing that seemed to be some sort of private joke.

"Okay. I check. Stop worry."

"I'm not worried," Larry said with heavy sarcasm, "I'm just through. Finished. Busted."

"Stop worry I say. Johnny Dee say all right. I fix. I call you back. You at office?"

"I'm not on the golf course," Larry said and banged the phone in its cradle. Dee's word game always rasped on his nerves and he did not appreciate it now.

Johnny Dee rolled his lips back at the sharp sound in his ear, disconnected, then poked with a fat, short finger at the dial until after some delay he reached Information. She gave him the number of the purchasing department at the Big C Jersey City plant and he dialed that and asked for Dan Hawley. When the assistant purchasing agent came to the phone Dee still used his grating idiom.

"Johnny Dee. What you try and do, cancel my soap powder?"

Hawley's hand tightened around the receiver. He glanced at the glass partition that separated his office from his secretary's cubbyhole, and lowered his voice.

"I told you never to call me here."

"Then do things right. How come this cancel?"

"I don't know. I'll have to check."

"Check," Johnny Dee said and broke the connection.

Hawley looked at his instrument as if it had bitten him. After time to compose himself he went to the file room, found the Wade Brothers' contract with a note attached that it was canceled. With it also was a four-line report from the chemists at the testing laboratory, branding the product unsatisfactory, and a carbon of the letter written to Frank Wade, signed by Forbes Adams and initialed by his secretary. He returned to his desk and sat pretending

o work, putting off making the return call to Dee. He had he uneasy feeling that that call was going to be unpleasnt. By noon he dared not stall any longer and he dialed he number of The Tavern and, when Dee answered, said stiffly, "The chemist's report of a second sampling shows that the soap is not up to quality. There is nothing I can do, since the formula on which we made the contract has been changed."

Dee wheezed. "Come out here, now."

"I said I can't do anything."

"Now. Or I send a man." The phone clicked.

three

HAWLEY took Twenty-two west, made the turn at Brian Road, and drove into The Tavern's parking lot where Dee's big Plymouth was in the rear stall. The room inside was dark, strong with a beer smell, the floor under a soggy sprinkling of sawdust was scarred by many forgotten brawls, and the noise level was high with the jukebox's blare.

Dee was at his table and alone. Nobody who knew what he was doing ever approached that table if somebody was with the fat man, but now there was no way for Hawley to delay.

He crossed the room regretting that he had ever made that first trip to the loan shark months ago. At the time his bookmaker had been hounding him for five hundred dollars he had lost on a race. The race was supposed to be fixed, both the trainer and owner were supposed to be betting, but the horse had run sixth and his tipster had shrugged it off with the crack that maybe somebody forgot to tell the horse about the fix.

The bookmaker said he knew Hawley was good for the debt but that he was short himself, that he had been clobbered and had to pay off and that if Hawley couldn't get the money elsewhere he could borrow it from Dee. The in-

terest charges would be steep but the man did not require security.

Johnny Dee had been pleasant and cooperative and said the interest would be six for five. Dan Hawley had not understood what that meant but he only needed the loan for a week and the charge could not be too much. But when on Saturday night he had returned to repay the man Johnny Dee had asked for six hundred dollars. One hundred dollars interest. Hawley had been outraged and threatened to go to the police. The fat man had been patient, still pleasant, even apologetic. He said he had thought Hawley knew about "vigorish" interest and that any friend of Benny the bookmaker should be given a break.

"I'll tell you what," Dee had told him. "You do me a favor and I forget the vigorish—hell, I forget the loan."

Still angry, Hawley wanted to know what the favor was.

"Benny says you're the guy who buys for the Big C stores, so . . ."

"I'm only his assistant," Hawley had interrupted.

"Same thing." Dee was rubbing a fat finger at his broken, crooked nose. "I got a little business. I sell olive oil. Like to sell you some."

Hawley had demurred that Big C already had enough suppliers of olive oil, but Dee didn't seem to hear him.

"Good olive oil," he had gone on, "Imported, Italian. I'll make you a price you can't beat anywhere. You buy from me and I forget the six bills."

It could be done, Hawley had thought, if the oil passed the lab tests and came up to Big C standards. Forbes Adams would not object if the new oil was top grade and the price all right. Only, if Adams ever found out that Hawley had in effect taken a bribe it would end his connection with Conglomerated. Forbes was unnecessarily strict about honesty. He had fired one buyer for accepting two tickets to one of the Jets' games.

The deal had been made and Hawley breathed easy again when the oil tested very well, and thought he had seen the last of the loan shark. But later Dee had called him at the office to say he had to see him at once, and when Hawley tried to excuse himself on the grounds of

work pressure, Dee had said if he was too busy he would take the matter up with Hawley's boss.

That scared Hawley. He did not want those two even to speak to each other, and he went unwillingly to The Tavern. Again Dee wanted Big C business. This time it was soap powder. He said he knew that Big C bought products for its own label from various producers around the country. His sales agency was now representing the Wade Brothers and he wanted the exclusive area contract for their company. Hawley knew that the existing supplier's contract was expiring. This time, too, Hawley agreed, on the sole condition that the Wade product meet the Big C specifications. He was urged to the agreement by the earlier implication over the phone that Dee might go over his head to Forbes Adams, and that the olive oil deal could be exposed. Dee did not threaten but the possibility was there in Hawley's mind. The Wade soap contract was awarded, and now it had backfired because the producers had idiotically cheapened the soap powder.

Now as he reached the fat man's table he knew that he had to make Dee see the Big C policy clearly.

"The cancellation is the Wades' own fault," he began before Dee could speak. "Maybe I can get the contract renewed if they show us a good product, but we can't use the junk they sent us. You've got to understand that."

Dee was not now the friendly, reasonable loan shark. He folded his arms on the table and leaned across them, wheezing heavily.

"It's you who got to understand, and that nut boss of yours. Okay, we fix the soap better next time. Right now I got a hundred thousand pounds that has got to move. You tell him take that soap or something very bad gonna happen. Very, very bad."

Dan Hawley thought Dee meant he would tell Adams about the olive oil and he said wildly, "He won't take it no matter what you tell him. Go ahead and get me fired, but that still won't put that stuff back in the stores. There's no way. And I've had enough. I'm through." He got up and stormed out of the place.

Johnny Dee watched him go but did not move, did not call him back. Hawley would be around when he needed

him, but now he had to do something about the guy Adams. First, though, he needed to find out how far he could go. There was trouble brewing among the families, plenty of trouble, and Johnny Dee did not want to make a mistake. He lifted a finger for the bartender to bring him a drink. Dee seldom drank because it bothered his ulcers, but he was going to see the Bag Man and that was always a ticklish visit to make.

Johnny Dee did not usually bother Julio Pugaliese, Sr., with minor matters although his relations with the Don seemed cordial. They might even be classed as friends, since Pugaliese had sponsored Dee in his climb up the organization ladder. Yet there was an underlying strain on Dee's part.

Pugaliese was an old-time greaseball. He had been around a long while. As a kid he had known Capone before Big Al left Five Points for Chicago. He had seen the gang wars in 1930 when Joe (the Boss) Masseria had decided to wipe out the Sicilians and brought on the bloodiest underworld struggle in history. He had helped Maranzano establish the *Cosa Nostra* on the ashes of the old Mafia so that the Neapolitans as well as the Sicilians could be bound by the blood oath and *Omerta,* the law of silence. Then when Maranzano had tried to establish himself as *capo di tutti capi,* supreme boss, and Luciano had rebelled, Pugaliese had helped Lucky, and he was one of the younger men sent to Chicago to explain to the ailing Capone why it had been necessary to hit Maranzano. When you killed a Don, the heads of all the other families had to know why.

Yes, Julio Pugaliese, Sr., had built "respect" for himself, but in Johnny Dee's private opinion the old man was getting along in years and was making mistakes that he would not have made ten, even five years ago.

Furthermore, while he believed that the Bag Man trusted him even though you could never be sure just what was in the Don's mind, it rankled in Johnny Dee that he had never had what he considered a sufficient reward for all he had done for Pugaliese.

Dee felt that he should have been made *sottocapo.* But

Pugaliese still wanted him running the sales agency that handled the olive oil business which Pugaliese held as a personal property; he did not want it confused with the various other operations of the family members.

So Dee remained a step below as a *caporegime* even if his was the largest group of button men in the family. Some seventy soldiers took their orders directly from him. His main concern was directing these salesmen who made certain that all the small Italian groceries stocked the Pugaliese olive oil and no other brand, but like the other lieutenants he had many duties. He felt that he deserved a larger income.

Every Christmas eve the Bag Man threw a party for his lieutenants at the end of which each man was given an envelope full of cash. The amount in each envelope reflected the lieutenant's recognized position in the family, and Dee's last one had contained two hundred thousand in cash. The money was not his own but for his use. He would be expected to repay it at the end of the year plus twenty-five percent interest.

He, in turn, divided the cash among his soldiers, charging them fifty-two percent interest, and they spread it out "on the street," getting whatever the distressed borrowers could pay. Sometimes on short-term loans the interest added up to as high as two hundred and eighty percent. His button men were in many diverse occupations, cooking illegal alcohol, placing jukeboxes and cigarette machines in bars and restaurants, counterfeiting pari-mutuel tickets, passing hot bonds or money, collecting from the numbers drops. Johnny Dee assigned an area to each and took a percentage of their collections for protecting them. That percentage he had to split with the Don.

Neither Dee nor anyone else knew what Pugaliese's real income was, and the only man capable of making an educated guess was Pugaliese's Jew, Jerry Konner.

In his early work Jerry Konner had been known as the Ice Pick, for his favorite form of murder, thrusting an ice pick into a victim's brain through his ear. It was surprising how many medical examiners had misdiagnosed the cause of death and the method had attracted Julio Pugaliese from the first time he heard of it. Jerry was quite famous

for the practice in Las Vegas, where Julio first met him, and the Devil's Graveyard, that stretch of bleak desert separating Vegas from Palm Springs, was supposedly well populated with Jerry's undiscovered targets.

At the time, Julio Pugaliese was carrying the bag for the Jersey family, collecting money skimmed from the Casino receipts before the reports were made to the state gaming board. Vegas was an open town; any member of the *Cosa Nostra* could operate there no matter which family he belonged to, and it was Julio's duty to take the money to Miami and turn it over to a Jewish gangster, the Broker. The Broker then divided it among the holders of "points" in the casinos and forwarded it to the numbered Swiss bank accounts, from which it could be withdrawn later without alerting the Internal Revenue Service.

It had been a very important trust and Julio was proud that he was still called the Bag Man even though he had moved up to Don when Angel Angelotti succumbed to a nylon necktie drawn too tight.

When Julio Pugaliese stepped into Angel's two-hundred-dollar shoes his first act was to bring Jerry Konner east. It was important that a Don have a Jew he could trust to keep his figures. Charles Lucky had initiated the practice a long time ago.

Jerry sat at the big desk in the library of the Pugaliese house checking over policy slips when Johnny Dee came in. Jerry did not trouble to look up. It was a long room with wide, tall windows opening a vista of a sweeping formal garden with a backdrop of gentle hills along the river. The library walls were filled with shelves of books, which had been left there when the Bag Man bought the estate. Only Julio junior had ever looked into the books. He had found there what must be the most extensive collection of erotica in existence, and in delight had kept it as his secret. The house had belonged to a former governor.

The Bag Man was at the windows, hands folded serenely behind his back, looking out over the garden, which was similar in design to one in Rome that Pugaliese had seen on his sole trip back to the old country. One long avenue was double-bordered with white Romanesque statues each of which was—so went a grisly, silent, speculative joke

among the family—a tombstone. Many gangsters who had walked in through the high gate in the high fence that enclosed the estate had not been seen again. All except one of the marble figures were replicas of those honoring famous men of ancient history, but the one at the end, facing the avenue and dominating the entire lawn, was a heroic monolith in the toga and laurel wreath of Julius Caesar, the head bearing the chiseled features of Don Julio Pugaliese, the Bag Man.

Julio did not turn at the sound of Johnny Dee's entrance. He had seen who was coming on the closed circuit television when Dee had stopped his car at the gate for inspection and permission to drive through. The whole estate was electrically guarded. The White House itself had no better protection. Pugaliese allowed time for Dee to waddle to the center of the room and stand until he was sufficiently uncomfortable. Then he faced about, his thick, strongly sculptured lips stretched in what on another face would be a snarl but on the Don was a smile.

"Hey," he said in welcome.

Johnny Dee dipped his head without speaking, scenting for the temper of the Don. He hated to admit even to himself that he was afraid of the Bag Man, although he was not alone in that. Everyone was afraid of Pugaliese, whose favor could be unpredictable.

"You come to see me?"

It was mildly critical, but only mildly. Dee nodded again.

"I come with respect."

"The way a man should come. Always with respect."

That was formal enough, not unfriendly, and now Dee considered how he might broach his subject without incurring his Don's anger, while Pugaliese wondered what had happened that was urgent enough to bring the fat man here. Pugaliese discouraged his lieutenants from personal visits unless they were sent for. Normally he met with them in the business office behind the banquet room of the big motor hotel he owned on Route Twenty-two.

"What trouble?" he asked.

The fat man was gratefully relieved that his Don had

made the opening, and in his relief he gave explosive vent to his frustration in his ominous idiom.

"Motherfucker sonabitch Adams wants screw me, stick me hundred thousand pounds soap."

"What Adams is this?"

Jerry Konner answered for Johnny without taking his major attention off the policy slips. "Purchasing agent for Conglomerated Stores here."

The Don's frown was terrible. "You said you had a fix."

Sweat-faced now, Johnny said hurriedly. "Assistant in my pocket."

"Why don't you have the boss?"

"No way. No handle on him."

At the card table in the rear of the room where Pugaliese's two sons were playing gin rummy, Tough Tony—the older—grinned at Little Julio, who had brought the Wades into the soap squeeze, and said, "Shits."

The Don looked that way and frowned deeply. Tony was at the root of the present rumbling unrest among the families and recently he had been showing a dangerous incomprehension of balances. Certainly it was stupid to mock his brother in front of a *caporegime*. But it was the Don himself who had misjudged his first son.

Pugaliese had broken an organization rule and tried to set Tony up for himself in an operation in central California. Tough Tony was an abrasive man—short, with the shoulders of a gorilla, thick, heavy arms, hands that were too big for the rest of him, and covered with a mat of thick curly black hair. The family already established in Fresno had objected to his invasion of their territory, but Tony had told them to go to hell. He crushed the neck of their button man who broke into his bar and tried to burn the place, and battened down for a battle. But the Californians fooled him. They went into hiding and demanded a hearing before the *commissione*, and that governing body of the *Cosa Nostra* sent a command to Tony to appear before them to answer the charges. Tony elected to vanish. By driving day and night he succeeded in reaching the comparative safety of his father's house. The Bag Man

was one of the nine ruling Dons, and was ordered by the other eight to either produce his son or present himself. Instead, Julio had sent his *consiglière* to say that his bladder was acting up and he could not make a long trip immediately.

So matters stood. No one wanted war except the Californians whom the Pugalicse family had insulted. The *commissione* did not dare order the Big Man to appear again and risk his flat refusal, of which they knew he was capable. He was too arrogant and unpredictable already. Yet, if he did refuse and they did not have him hit, it would cost them the respect of their button men, which was the only cement that kept the organization in business. Face was as important to a *Cosa Nostra* Don as it had been to the old Chinese warlords, and for exactly the same reasons.

Thus the underworld was strained. It was in more peril than it had known since Genovese had tried to have Costello hit. Anything upsetting could cause war to break out.

Johnny Dee laid the whole blame on Tough Tony, and he read the way the Don looked at both his sons as saying, "Look what you stupid ratfinks have got us into now." Because Little Julio must be blamed, too, for not making sure that the Wades would not pull such a stunt as that which had created Johnny's present problem, the problem that could be a tinder box. He wished they had never heard of soap powder. They were in no position to back off and take the loss. It would show a weakness at a time when all the other families were mad at the Pugaliese family and watching like jackals for a chance to knock it down. Johnny was sweating so much that the armpits of his black silk suit were damp half-moons when the Don turned back to him as if he were surprised that the fat man was still there, and returned to the subject at hand.

"So what do you want from me, Johnny Dee?"

Johnny's very red tongue lapped his lips. He knew that he was out on a limb himself. The arms of the organization were expected to function on their own, so that no act of an individual soldier could be traceable back to his lieutenant, nor any act of the lieutenant traceable to the Don, yet he had had to come here for help.

"You should tell me how far I can go." That critical frown was laid on him again, but Johnny plunged on desperately, throwing a meaningful look at Tony's bent head and lowering his voice. "The way it sets I don't know how much pressure. We don't need trouble now, I think."

Don Pugaliese understood precisely and weighed his options and his obligations. On one hand, there were his sons and their advancement to consider. Of the two, Tough Tony was his favorite. He could understand Tony more than he ever had Little Julio. It was ironic that the Bag Man should stand over five feet seven and be known as Big Julio while his younger boy was over six-two and called Little Julio, but it was not this oversize in a short-statured race that made him so different. Like most *Cosa Nostra* members, the Don was pleased that he could give his children a good education, but now that Little Julio was out of law school and practicing, his father found it next to impossible to communicate with him, sensed an impatience in him, and knew that he saw the Don as an old greaseball.

It was not that there was any distinction of moral conscience between them. The boy had studied law, not out of respect for it but to learn the ways of using and circumventing it. It was simply that most of the time the Bag Man did not know what Little Julio was talking about.

Little Julio had a jibe for Johnny Dee. "What's the matter, man, you losing your grip? Bear down on this Adams character. He ain't so tough he can't be bent."

The fat man did not look the lawyer's way. Little Julio did not yet rate in the command structure of the family. He was the Don's son, but he still must earn his place. The lowest button man with a profitable living rated higher. A family head is not selected by blood connections but on demonstrated ability. A Don needs to be tough and shrewd and able to dominate by fear and ruthless force of will, and the Bag Man was not the first to learn that he could not promote his blood children over the heads of men who have fought and proved themselves in the family business. Neither Little Julio nor Tough Tony could automatically step into his father's shoes. The Jersey family was too big and too rich in exploitable rackets for the *sot-*

tocapo and the lieutenants to submit to that kind of succession when the old Don could no longer hold onto his domination. That, Johnny Dee knew, was why the Don had shipped Tony west to try to carve a place for himself out there. The central California family was small, not over twenty or twenty-five soldiers, but the Pacific coast was growing, and the man who could grab and hold a territory could build the rackets into something well worth having. Johnny Dee ignored the lawyer's interruption as inconsequential and pressed the Don.

"How far can I go without stirring up a war?"

Julio Pugaliese made up his mind. His younger son had brought in the soap company idea in the first place, contending that all women used soap, a lot of soap, and it was not reasonable for the Pugaliese family to sit still and watch Procter & Gamble, and Lever Brothers skim all the cream. The Don would back him up because face must not be lost, inviting attack.

"Give Adams the message," he said. "Make him understand. Do all that is right."

The fat man left, having his answer. Pugaliese had given him the go-ahead to use his own judgment, apply all the necessary pressure. He could even have Adams hit if there were no other way.

Johnny Dee laid his plans as he tooled the big car back toward The Tavern. It was nine-thirty, Adams should be home, maybe just going to bed. Maybe he was already there fucking his wife. Maybe Dee could get at him through the wife if he wouldn't be reasonable otherwise. Then he had a better idea. He might not try too hard to pressure Forbes Adams. If Adams was hit, his assistant would probably be moved up into the higher position. He could kill two birds with one stone. The picture pleased him though, the picture of the man being pulled off his wife by a phone call and hearing that unless he honored the contract with the Wade Brothers' Company he might not live to enjoy her much longer.

four

IN BUILDING his grocery and baking company Clarence Howe's father had known personally every one of his employees, known about their families and their problems. Clarence had grown up and had inherited the business with the same commitment. Even now, after all the buying and merging of other chains, he still tried to keep in friendly touch with the department heads of the eight zone branches that blanketed the United States.

It was nearly noon before he reached his office and summoned his new president. To Jason Dearborne he looked suddenly older, more shrunken, even bowed, grieved, and oddly bewildered. He had Forbes Adams' young widow with him and said he had spent the night in New Jersey to be of what help he could.

Jason had met her once briefly in Adams' office when he had passed through as McHale was showing him around the Jersey City warehouse. He had been concentrating on the tour and hardly noticed her. He noticed her now with a jolt that was much too electric to be accounted for as a pure reaction to looking on a person so recently struck by tragedy.

She was twenty-two or -three, her hair a moon-glow blond, her eyes gray blue, direct and open to hurt. They were deep with hurt as she looked at Jason. Her face was

pale, even the very light-toned lipstick drew attention to the delicate but frank, quiet mouth. She was not a classic beauty but she was utterly lovely, especially so in sorrow. She acknowledged the second introduction to Dearborne with simple dignity that included a small, costly smile when Dearborne remembered aloud that they had met before.

Jason swallowed the obstruction in his throat, held back the "I'm terribly sorry" he had been about to say, and could think of nothing else that did not sound just as inane. He sat down and made himself look away from her to Clarence Howe.

"Jason," Howe said, "Mary has some very disturbing information. I wish I did not have to ask her to repeat it at this time but this appears to be the only opportunity you will have to hear it from her as I think you must. You're not emotionally involved and your clear mind may find something that I haven't. Mary, if you will . . ."

"It's all right, Mr. Howe." She drew up another smile for him. Her voice was steady, deeper than Dearborne would expect from so ethereal-looking a woman. "Mr. Dearborne, my husband received three telephone calls on successive evenings. The third was a threat against his life. I believe I talked with the man who killed him."

"Ooh." It was a small, soft sound that escaped him as though driven. . . . How could she keep such composure and say those words this morning, he wondered, and then realized that she must be under medication. "Your husband received them but you talked to the man? Could you explain that please?"

"I answered the rings," she said. "The voice asked for Forbes." As she spoke the name a muscle near her eye twitched. She was not really calm then. "It was a guttural, wheezing voice, an ugly voice. I called Forbes and heard his end of the conversation. He spoke very coldly, rejecting whatever the man wanted. I heard, 'I will not agree to that,' then Forbes hung up.

"The next night it was the same, only Forbes sounded angrier. The third time the man shouted at me to call Forbes. He was so loud that I could hear what he said

after Forbes took the phone. He said, 'Adams, you'd better believe. You make good on that order tomorrow or you get hit.' " She drew a breath. "The next night was last night."

"Order?" Dearborne picked up the word. "Do you know what order, what kind of an order they were talking about?"

"No I don't. Forbes was so furious that when I asked him if he didn't want to blow off some steam to me he was short with me. He said, 'Just a business hitch. Forget it.' That's all I have to tell."

She sank back in the chair but her eyes stayed on Dearborne, haunted, looking like a child asking if she had done her lesson well. There was a long period of silence as though the girl and Howe were giving Dearborne time to think. Then Howe said in a low voice, "Do you make anything of it, Jason?"

"Not very much yet. I never heard of a purchasing agent being shot because of an order, but . . ." He got up and crossed to the phone on Howe's desk. "If it is a matter of Big C business, his assistant may know something about it."

He called the warehouse, asked for Dan Hawley and was told that Mr. Hawley was not in. He told the secretary that Jason Dearborne wanted to see him in the afternoon, hung up, and turned back to Mary Adams.

"Did you tell the police about this last night? I assume they came to see you."

The girl lowered her eyes to her lap and let her shoulders droop. "I was not at home. I was playing cards with some friends. I didn't expect Forbes until eight. When the news flash came over the television, I'm afraid I was hysterical. Someone gave me some sleeping pills and I didn't wake up until morning. Mr. Howe knew some of our friends and had just tracked me down. I told him, and we went to the police then, before we came here. Mr. Dearborne, Mr. Howe, this is about all I feel up to just now. I'd like to go home and rest. Home. . . ." her control began to slip and she put a hand to her cheek. "It just doesn't seem real, that he won't be coming there any more."

"Don't go there," Jason said quickly. "You shouldn't be alone and, well, it had better be said, until we learn more about this you should not be where the man you heard can locate you. He may possibly believe you could identify his voice. You may be in danger."

The idea had not occurred to her, and fright was added to her grief.

"Indeed. Indeed." Clarence Howe was impatient with himself for not having already foreseen that danger. "You go back to the Farrells, Mary, and stay there. I'll send you out in my car."

He rang the basement garage and ordered the car for her, then buzzed a secretary to ride with her. She continued to sit, making no protest but not moving until Jason brought a glass of water, helped her hold it, then helped her to her feet. She was so unsteady that he put an arm around her shoulders, went with her to the elevator and down, and put her in the car while the secretary got in from the other side. Mary Adams held his hand tightly for the assist onto the seat, then gave it a further pressure.

"Thank you," she said with some return of composure. "And thank Mr. Howe. He said he would make all the arrangements."

"We will," Jason reassured her. "And anything else you need, be sure to call on us."

He closed the door and watched the car drive up the ramp before he went back to Howe. Her light scent, the warmth of her body through his clothes, the sensation of her fingers on his lingered with him all the way to the office. That active, physical memory had never happened to him before.

Clarence Howe was at the window looking down on the miniature figures on the avenue and did not turn when Jason closed the door. He shook his head and said in a pained tone, "You know, I nearly raised that boy. He started with us as a stock clerk. There was something extra about him. He always had a couple of slips in the idea box . . . how to improve our displays . . . how to expedite moving goods from the warehouse to the stores . . .

how to improve order forms so a store manager could keep a running inventory . . . I don't understand. . . ."

Now that the young widow was out of hearing there were questions Dearborne wanted to ask. He said first, "What did you know about his personal life?"

Howe came heavily to his chair and lowered himself to the cushion. "If you mean women, I don't think he ever glanced at anyone but Mary."

"I wasn't thinking of that. I was wondering if he was in some personal trouble, gambling perhaps. The order he was told to make good on could have been a gambling debt."

"He told Mary it was business."

"He might have done it to throw her off."

Howe shook his head again. "I don't believe it. He wasn't the type to gamble and I can't see him lying to his wife. He was very proud of her."

"Well," Dearborne said, "If it is connected with us I'd better go talk to Hawley and McHale."

Dan Hawley was not at the warehouse. There was a detective waiting for him on the same errand as Dearborne, with Hawley's very nervous secretary. The arrival of the new president increased her nervousness. The detective had already drawn out of her all he could get, and when he understood who Jason Dearborne was, he saw no reason not to repeat what he had learned, but he was unkindly blunt about it.

Grace Turner was in love with Dan Hawley and wanted to marry him but had not yet made it because Hawley insisted he was not making money enough to marry. Everyone was upset over Forbes Adams' murder but Hawley was particularly affected. Grace had gone home with him for the night to try to comfort him. She felt ghoulish and guilty about using the prospect that Hawley would inherit Adams' job to try to get him out of his mood but she had to do something. He just sat limp in the car while she drove and at the apartment had dropped into a chair, saying nothing, staring off into space. She had been at pains

to make him a nice dinner but he would not eat. He had had a phone call, had taken it on the bedroom extension, and she had not listened in, but afterward he had been like a trapped animal. He was a gentle lover but last night he had been wild, tearing at her as though he wanted to climb all the way inside her. This morning they had come to the warehouse very early although he was so pale and shaken that she wanted him to stay in bed. While she stopped at her cubicle Hawley had gone on to the file stacks. She did not know which one or ones he used, there were so many of them, but he had come back shortly, told her he was going out, and started off. She had asked when he would be back, and he had looked at her vaguely, as if he had never seen her before, and said, "Oh, in an hour or two." She had asked where she could reach him but he hadn't told her, only said he was going out to check a couple of suppliers. She had watched from the window as he crossed the parking lot, got into his car, started the motor, but then had just sat as though he could not make up his mind where to go first. He had finally driven out the main gate. It was now late afternoon and she had not seen nor heard from him since.

Dan Hawley was terrified. Johnny Dee had not been the man who had shot Forbes Adams, but Hawley was positive Dee had ordered the killing. He had not foreseen such an extreme measure. He had thought that they might work Forbes over until he consented to accept the bad soap. Forbes could have used that single shipment without too much discredit to the company. But to kill him in cold blood. Dee was, of course, a mobster, yet Hawley had believed the famous quote from Bugsy Siegel that "we only kill each other."

His hands were sweating so much that he used a handkerchief to hold the steering wheel. He wished he had the nerve to tell Johnny Dee to go to hell. He wished he had the nerve to go to the nearest police station, but he did not. You never knew whether or not the cop you talked to was on the take.

Dee's phone call last night had told him to get to the of-

fice the first thing in the morning and bring him from the Wade Brothers' file all references to the poor quality of the soap and the cancellation of the contract. He had them in his pocket and Johnny Dee was waiting for him at The Tavern.

The room smelled even worse in its emptiness at this early hour. The fat man was the only person there, at his table, talking on the phone. He hung up the instrument and beckoned to Hawley and when Hawley reached him said eagerly, "You get them?"

Hawley's mouth was too dry to speak. He tossed the papers on the table. Dee looked them over—the chemist's report, the cancellation note, and the carbon of the letter Forbes Adams had written to the Wade Company—and stuffed them in his coat pocket. He grinned up at Hawley.

"Sit down, boy, have a shot on Johnny Dee."

Hawley shook his head. His stomach crawled, and he was not certain he was not going to vomit. Johnny Dee ignored the refusal, got up, waddled behind the bar, and brought back a bottle and glasses. He appeared to be in a grotesquely fine humor now.

"Park it, kid. We celebrate."

Hawley's eyes tried to start from his head. Dee guffawed.

"Sure, kid, celebrate. You get Adams' job."

"I . . . I don't know." Hawley wanted to run but his legs would no longer hold him up. He sat down.

"You get." Dee was back to his cryptics but now using them as fun and games. "You get. We do lotsa business. Get us rich-rich. Here, drink."

The next half hour was a nightmare. Forbes Adams' death was bad enough but to listen to this monster gloat about what he and Hawley would do to the Big C Stores was a horror. He finally broke away by saying that unless he got back to work he would be fired instead of promoted, and Dee let him go.

He had no intention of going back to the office. He could not face anyone else on this day. He did not want to go to his apartment, where Grace Turner might call. He drove aimlessly until another driver yelled at him and he

knew that he should not be behind the wheel in this state, and he stopped at another bar, some place he had never been before. He chose a table, afraid he could not stay on a stool, and drank one bourbon after another. He did not often drink anything stronger than beer. It amazed him that he seemed to get more sober with every shot.

He could not remember how many drinks he took; he did not recall leaving the building and climbing into his car. There he was in the seat, fitting his ignition key in the slot, lightheaded but perfectly able. The motor caught, he backed out of the stall, and drove down the street. He did not see the stop light. He never saw the truck. He heard the crashing noise but for only half a second. Then he was dead.

The truck had tried to swerve. It swayed and caromed off and bounced against the far curb. A police cruiser was parked, watching the intersection, and the two men in it were out and across the street before the shocked truck driver had opened his door and dropped to the pavement. He was stammering.

"He came through the light. He came at me. The jerk. The jerk never stopped."

"We saw it," one cop said. "You all right?" He made a quick examination, found no blood, and told the man to sit down until he got over the shakes.

His partner headed for the wrecked coupe. He tugged at the door until it gave. Hawley's body tumbled sidewise into the street. The cop bent and found Hawley's wallet, opened it, and looked for identification. There were a license and business cards. The other cop joined him and he said, "Call the meat wagon. Ambulance won't help this one. Smell him."

"Already embalmed. In alcohol. Any ID?"

"Cards say Dan Hawley, worked for the Big C warehouse, Jersey City. You might tell the dispatcher."

The officer called the dispatcher who called the warehouse. The switchboard operator there misunderstood and thought the call was for Dan Hawley. She plugged the sergeant through to Grace Turner.

Jason Dearborne and the detective were standing near

the girl. She collapsed unconscious against the detective and he caught her. Dearborne grabbed for the phone.

"Who is it? What is it?"

The sergeant said, "This is the police. You had a Dan Hawley working there?"

"Yes, we do. Where is he?"

"The word is *did*, mister. He drove into a truck. Can somebody come down and identify the body?"

Girls from the outer office took over with Grace Turner. Jason took McHale with him to the morgue. The detective went with them. After the warehouse superintendent had made the identification, all three men went to the Newark precinct station to talk to the sergeant who had reported the death.

"Hello, Steve," the detective said. "Do you have proof positive that Hawley's death was an accident?"

"Bud . . . sure. He was drunk as a skunk and ran a red light, drove straight into the truck. The prowl car was parked with a front-row seat. No doubt in the world."

Jason Dearborne said to McHale, "Was Hawley much of a drinking man?"

The superintendent shrugged. "Not that I know of. I've had a couple of beers with him now and then, nothing stronger, but you might ask his secretary. They, uh, knew each other pretty well."

The detective, Bud Sanders, made a note in his little book and spoke with his head bent. "Anybody know who his next of kin are?"

Neither Jason nor McHale did and again McHale suggested Grace Turner. They all returned to the warehouse and were told that Grace Turner had gone home. Jason got her phone number and called. A neighbor woman answered and said the secretary was in bed but agreed to ask her about Hawley's drinking habits and any relatives who should be notified. She relayed the information that Hawley never drank more than one bourbon and that very seldom, and that his only relation was a sister in Canada to whom Grace would write.

"Well," said Sanders, "I guess that's a dead end. Now let's get back on the Adams thing."

Both he and Dearborne questioned McHale at length, but the superintendent did not know and could not guess at anything connected with the warehouse that might have gotten the buyer killed.

five

THE FUNERAL for Forbes Adams was small, restricted to the widow, Clarence Howe, a few personal friends, and a few employees of the store chain. Jason Dearborne did not approve of funerals but he felt impelled to attend this one. He had a few words with Mary Adams before he put her into the Howe limousine. She was going directly to the airport for a flight to Southern California. She had been raised in Glendale and while her family were all gone she still had friends there.

She gave him a firm handclasp and said, "Thank you, Mr. Dearborne. You have all been so kind."

Unaccountably he said, "Call me when you get back, let me know how you're doing." Why did he feel that he should follow up on what she did?

She promised and he stood waiting as the car drew away, feeling at loose ends. A funeral service was so final that it took effort to pick up the threads of normal routine at once. He walked to his own car and drove toward the office, his mind straying, wondering what Mary Adams would do with her life.

She had been Adams' secretary before they married. There were no children nor any firm ties in the East. Perhaps it would be best for her to stay on the West Coast. Something within him rebelled against that solution.

It jarred him into a closer look. What the devil was the matter with him? He hardly knew the woman. He was engaged to Edy Bullock. Was he being overly sentimental because an employee who was almost a stranger had been shot and had left an uncommonly attractive widow?

His drive toward women had always been conveniently latent; he had never wanted too deep an involvement. He had been too busy getting where he was and he had seen men going up in the business world who married too young, married women who could not develop and grow with their husbands. It was a mistake he had not made. He was not in love with Edy, not in the soul-shaking, blind manner so dear to the heart of the Victorian novelist, and he doubted that that kind of passion really existed. Certainly there was a biological drive in men and women, certainly each needed a fair amount of sex. But in marriage more was needed, a mutual respect, the ability to share ideas and activities, and ideally a comprehension of your partner's work.

"I must be nuts." He said it aloud as he put the car down the garage ramp. As he caught the highspeed elevator to the thirtieth floor, he said, "What am I thinking about? I've got Edy. I ought to be satisfied." Walking down the long interior corridor, he knew that he was not wholly satisfied. Someplace back in his subconscious mind he had drawn a picture of the woman he hoped to marry. Edy did not really fit that picture, at least she did not stay in register.

"Hell with it," he said, and turned in at Tinker's door.

She looked up brightly. "How was the funeral?"

The question annoyed him. "How is any funeral? Gruesome. Barbaric."

He saw her shock. Tinker had been with him all the way through his climb up the corporate maze of Conglomerated Stores but he still had not plumbed the depths of her conservatism.

"I'm sorry, guess I'm just on edge. Don't send anyone in until the call comes through from Mrs. Bullock."

His hand was on the door of his office when she said, "You've already got a visitor in there."

He looked back. "Inside? Why?"

"He's FBI." She consulted a memorandum slip. "Mr. J. J. Russo." Her eyes were worried. "He wouldn't tell me what he wants, but I thought I'd better let him in. . . ."

He nodded and his lips turned up. "You never know." He pushed the door open and went through.

A man swung around casually from the big window that overlooked the Avenue of the Americas. Jason guessed him to be in his early thirties and there was no doubt that he had Italian blood, although the tight skull of curls on his round head was blond and his eyes were very blue and disconcertingly direct. Jason thought of a satyr. There were long, thick lashes on somewhat heavy lids and the eyes slanted up and out a trifle. The nose was narrow and straight, and below it a Cupid's bow mouth twisted at one corner in what Jason thought was mockery. Later he learned that a fractured jaw had not been set just right.

"Mr. Russo?" he said.

"That's right." The eyes took stock of Jason. "You Mr. Dearborne? I expected someone older, in this position."

Jason offered a hand without comment and indicated the customer's chair, then took his own seat.

"You're from the FBI, my secretary told me . . ."

Russo flipped open an ID case and showed it across the desk. "I'd like to ask some questions about the Forbes Adams murder."

Jason said, "Oh?" in surprise. "It was my impression that your office only worked on interstate matters."

"Usually we do.'"

"Then the Adams case? I'd assumed it was a local affair."

"It may or may not be." Russo smiled faintly without the humor reaching his eyes. "Do you mind answering some things?"

"Not at all, but I doubt if I can be of much help. I barely knew Forbes Adams. You see, I've only been in this job a few days."

"So I understand. I came here wanting to see Mr. Howe, but I'm told he's gone for the day. Still, you may have something I want and not know it. Does the name Johnny Dee mean anything to you?"

Jason thought carefully. "I don't believe so. I can't remember having heard it."

"How about Julio (the Bag Man) Pugaliese?"

Jason smiled at this. "The Bag Man . . . that sounds like a gangster. I don't know any gangsters . . . I hope. Who is he?"

Instead of answering Russo asked another question. "Who would know about your company doing any business with either of these men?"

"What kind of business?"

"Buying supplies. Olive oil, for instance."

"Purchasing . . . Forbes Adams' job . . ." Jason felt a prickle at the base of his scalp.

"Who else?" Russo wanted to know.

Jason's tingling increased. "His assistant would have known. Dan Hawley. But he was killed in a car accident the day after Adams was shot. Neither of them has been replaced yet."

The sharp blue eyes held Jason as if on a pitchfork, and Russo's voice quickened with new interest.

"I hadn't heard about Hawley. What makes you sure it was an accident?"

Jason repeated the story and named Bud Sanders and the precinct sergeant for corroboration. Russo kept on looking deep within him.

"It sounds as if you yourself thought it might be more than an accident. Why?"

Jason Dearborne drew a long and ragged breath. "Well . . . because of the phone calls. Mr. Adams had three, the last one overheard by his wife, threatening him . . ." Russo nodded impatiently. He already knew that. Jason continued. "Later, on the night Adams was killed, his assistant received a call. I don't know anything more about that, but the next morning he went out and got blind drunk, a thing he apparently never did. His secretary told us. She thought he was unduly upset over his boss's death. But I wondered if there might not be a tie-in."

"I'll want to talk to both women," Russo said.

"You can see Grace Turner, but Mrs. Adams is on a plane bound for the West Coast. You can probably get her address out there later, from Mr. Howe. Now, Mr.

Russo I asked who the two men you mentioned were. Would you mind. . . ?"

Russo sat back in his chair and crossed his legs, relaxing. Jason realized that he had not been aware of the tension Russo had shown until then.

"I intended to tell you . . . and some other things . . . when I finished. I have, for the moment. Julio Pugaliese is, for the record, an importer of olive oil. Sometimes called the Olive King of South Jersey. And that is all he would like anyone to believe. Fact is, he is also the boss of the Jersey family of the *Cosa Nostra* and one of the nine Dons who make up the *commissione* that governs the body."

Jason Dearborne leaned forward and flattened his hands on his desk. "Do you mean to tell me you think Conglomerated Stores is buying oil from a known gangster?"

"It's on your shelves."

Jason Dearborne choked. "We'll see about that," he said, then, less sharply, "I wonder if Forbes Adams knew? But the other man, Johnny Dee I think you said. Who is he?"

"A member of Pugaliese's family. I don't know his exact status, but he's probably a lieutenant, *caporegime* they're called. He runs the D & D Sales Company which acts as agent for the Pugaliese oil. He also does some loan sharking, although I don't have the proof on that, and I suspect he's got a large thumb in the numbers racket."

"So we'd be buying oil through him? Is there anything definite to connect them with Adams' death?"

"We think so. Another family member, Vito (the Bat Man) Contino, was shot and killed by a prowl-car policeman within minutes of the Adams murder. Contino was running away from a stolen car. There was a gun in the dash compartment. When ballistics checked the gun against slugs taken from a series of crimes, it turned out that was the one which killed Adams."

To the emotions generated by these unsettling revelations, Jason added frustration. "It's been four days, Mr. Russo. What took you so long to get here?"

The agent pulled up the satyr eyebrows but did not ap-

pear concerned. "Ballistics didn't get around to checking the gun for forty-eight hours. There was nothing to make it suspect in the Adams killing. Contino was shot more than twenty blocks from your warehouse. It was only because a young guy in the laboratory was practicing, examining slugs that had been fired by various guns, that the identification was made. Then it took another day for the police to remember to notify the Task Force."

As Jason had read about the several Task Forces which the President had ordered the Justice Department to organize, they were intended to assist local officials to fight crime, and the FBI was not included. He wondered how that famously jealous arm of justice could come into this case. He asked for an explanation.

Russo was obliging. "The Task Forces are each headed by a special attorney from the Justice Department," he said. "Each such attorney has a staff of his own and works closely with the state's attorney general. The one here works with the New Jersey State Investigating Committee . . . and with the cluster of local law enforcement groups. We, FBI, work out of our own headquarters because our function is a little different, but what we do is coordinated with the others."

six

JASON DEARBORNE was a very intent audience and Russo took grim satisfaction in telling him what he knew and what was surmised about the *Cosa Nostra.* He had a good deal of verified history, but like an iceberg the major information on the current organization and its workings was deep in secrecy. The subject was both an obsession and a frustration to the agent. It had been his main interest for most of his life.

Born James Joseph Russo and raised in the South Bronx, he had grown up knowing boys in the neighborhood who found thrills and spending money in petty crimes . . . burglary, purse snatching, mugging. He had watched them graduate into car thievery, pimping, into running for the numbers racket, and as they all moved into adulthood and scattered to different localities he knew in his soul that most of them slipped quietly into the mobs. In their youth he had seen them caught, arrested, convicted, fined, jailed, but as they advanced under the protective umbrella of the organization fewer and fewer of them were "busted" and fewer indictments stood up as far as conviction. That they must have become more skillful could not explain their immunity entirely. In the jaundiced wisdom of the streets it was accepted that they were being bought out of their troubles.

Russo had never been a part of any street gang nor a confidant of any member of them. Although he was Italian and therefore eligible in his neighborhood, he was ostracized. His father was on the cops. Neither did he want to be a part of the gangs, for Dante Russo had drilled into him from his first memory the despicability of all gangsters and a rage against those of Italian blood in particular.

"The bastards give us all a bad name," was a favorite lecture. "There are more guinea cops than there are dago shits, a hell of a lot more, but they get all the headlines. I catch you hanging around the streets and pool halls I'll whip the skin off your ass. You better believe me."

Dante Russo was an imposing figure in his sergeant's uniform. James had not only believed the threat, he had grown up with an unwavering ambition to follow him onto the force.

His second hero was his father's best friend, James Joseph Brandon, for whom he was named, although he was never called Jim or Joe. He was Jay Jay from the start. Brandon was a lieutenant by the time Jay Jay became anything at all, one of the best-known men on the force, and he shared unreservedly Dante's opinion of punks and gangsters. It was the big Irishman who had fanned and fostered and guided the boy's interest in the underground organization.

"It's your generation that will have to stop them," Brandon preached. "People my age, they just don't comprehend how big the menace is. The main weapon you have to have is knowledge. Get yourself a legal education, and learn all you can about the mobs."

Dante Russo was murdered, certainly by the organization, while Jay Jay was in law school, and that contracted the young man's objectivity into a personal dedication to fight them. Brandon coached him on the background history of the enemy.

In the old country the Sicilians had banded together under the name Mafia, swearing a blood oath to stand together and never to reveal any information about each other, calling it the oath of *Omerta,* of silence. They brought their secret society to America.

On the East Coast they found themselves challenged by

a looser group of Neapolitans, who found the Eighteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution a tailor-made springboard to power. Prohibition was an ideal climate for a people accustomed to wine making, and they had no difficulty accommodating themselves to beer and hard liquors.

The conflict between the two factions broke into hideous, open gang warfare in 1930, before Jay Jay Russo was born, and no one ever knew how many men died on either side. Many bodies were never found. It was brought on by a Neapolitan, Joe (The Boss) Masseria, at the time the most powerful gang leader in New York, which meant in the country. Masseria hated Sicilians worse than he hated Revenue officers, and decided to wipe them out. The Sicilians got wind of the plan and went underground, and both sides started shooting.

Masseria would probably have won had he not given way to a foolish greed. A Neapolitan lieutenant controlled the ice business in New York, a very lucrative racket, and Masseria reached to take it over personally. The lieutenant objected and Masseria had him killed. That frightened his other followers. If the boss would have his own lieutenant killed for this purpose, who was safe from him?

At another time they would simply have liquidated Masseria, but the gang war was raging and if the boss was gone the Sicilians could raid and annihilate them all before they could reorganize. Charles Lucky Luciano decided the Neapolitans' solution must be to make peace with Maranzano, leader of the Sicilians. But with the war, how could they make contact? Maranzano certainly was not going to come out of hiding and risk that a conference was a trick to kill him.

There was one possible intermediary in the Jew Lepke Buchalter, one of the bloodiest gangsters on record, who ran the numbers racket in Harlem in partnership with Luciano, and who had connections with Maranzano. A meeting was arranged and a deal made. Maranzano would call off the war if the Neapolitans would get rid of their leader and acknowledge the Sicilian as arbiter in any future disputes.

Luciano shot Masseria in a Coney Island restaurant,

and Maranzano began reorganizing gangland. The stumbling block was that only Sicilians were eligible to join in the blood oath. It is said that, ironically, it was again the Jew Lepke Buchalter who found a way to remove that hurdle. The old Mafia should be scrapped and a new organization established along the same lines, which anyone of Italian parentage could join. That was accomplished, and furthermore, it would be permitted that the new *Cosa Nostra* could make alliances with other, non-Italian mobs.

Maranzano divided the country between twenty-four gangs or families in which the leader of each was to be of equal power. But like Masseria, Maranzano decided that he was more equal than others. In a little over a year he began playing a dominant role and Luciano had him hit.

Luciano then took over, but he had sense enough not to pretend he was top dog even though there was no one big enough to stand against him. The feuding was over between the factions and an integrated, nationwide underground government was forged to present a united front.

Jay Jay Russo learned from James Brandon, and he read the transcripts of the various Senate hearings on crime. He studied the Valachi confessions, the work of Salerno in New York, of Hamilton in Los Angeles, the revelations of Genovese's divorced wife, anything and everything he could get his hands on. He talked with a former bag girl from the Detroit family, and with the Chicago Crime Commission investigators. He knew the identities of the heads of each family and of the major henchmen. He knew Julio (the Bag Man) Pugaliese and his two sons by sight, and for this New Jersey family he reserved the cold core of his anger, because it was by their hand that his father had died. He knew of the old, controversial leader, Frank Cataffo, who had retired, disgraced but intact, and now lived in immune splendor at Sands Point, Long Island. He knew a lot about them, from the outside. He could not get inside to learn more. And he had never been able to lay a hand on any of them.

He had seen hope when the Justice Department set up the task forces and immediately transferred to the Bureau's Newark office. For months now he had been

gathering whatever evidence he could find about the Jersey family's operations, but it was proving a slow task.

He had successfully bugged the office of the D & D sales company, but nothing of any interest was ever spoken over those phones or in those rooms. He had had the state men, posing as investigators looking for violations of the unemployment regulations, go over the agency's books, and they had turned up the fact that Johnny Dee was now representing the Wade Brothers' soap distribution.

The discovery had been more puzzling than helpful. His first idea was that the Wades were a front to disguise a gangster ownership of the factory, but further investigation proved incontestably that it had existed for fifty years, that it was still family owned, inherited by two cousins, and neither of them appeared ever to have had any connection with the underworld. He had been able to plant an agent in the soap company's warehouse when Frank Wade expanded his work force, and had learned that Wade Brothers' entire output was contracted for by the Big C Stores. Unfortunately the agent had no access to the front office and therefore had known nothing about the cancellation letter from Forbes Adams.

Russo made sure that Jason Dearborne understood all of this and was darkly amused at Dearborne's deep flush when he heard that Conglomerated Stores was buying the Wade product.

"You are sure that there is a connection between the Wades and the mob?" Dearborne asked.

Russo lifted and dropped his shoulders. "Johnny Dee sells Pugaliese's olive oil . . . you're buying that . . . Johnny Dee is selling Wade Brothers' soap. . . . You're buying that, too. To me it smells."

Dearborne looked at the wall clock and made a sour face. "It's too late to do anything today, Mr. Russo, but in the morning I'll have the lawyers find a way to break both these contracts."

"I'd rather you didn't . . . yet," Russo said. "I'd like to do a little more digging without alerting the Pugaliese tribe, if I can. Will you just keep this under your hat for a while to give me some time?"

Dearborne did not like that idea. It gave him the sensation of having scorpions in bed with him, but when Russo pressed him he agreed.

"May I talk to Clarence Howe about it?" he wanted to know. "After all, it was he you came looking for."

Russo considered this for a thoughtful moment, then shook his head. "I'd rather you did not talk to anyone just now. You *are* president, you have all the authority I'll need to prowl around, and you're cooperative. I don't know but what Howe might go through the roof and insist on immediate cancellations or blow my chances some way. He's got a lot of high connections. Will you just write me a letter asking your people at the warehouse to talk openly to me?"

The afternoon had been long, with all of Russo's revelations, and for Jason Dearborne the clock was ticking away precious time. He felt the primary responsibility for the good health of Conglomerated Stores and apparently something unhealthy was threatening the company. He was impatient to be doing something to get rid of that threat.

"I can do better than that," he said rapidly, and reached toward the intercom to call Tinker. "I'll get the warehouse superintendent's home phone and call him right away."

Russo moved quickly to stay the hand and his crooked mouth twisted further, turning down. "No dice. I realize it wouldn't occur to you, but your super is in a position to have a finger in whatever is going on himself. Or, an order relayed through him could give someone else the time to clean his skirts before I get there. Write me the letter, Mr. Dearborne, in your own hand, please, and don't identify me as an agent."

Jason used his new official stationery and found that he had to wipe sweat from his hands before he could control the pen. The act of putting the words down on paper served to create a sense of solid fact of what he had unconsciously been hoping was a nebulous speculation, and it shook him more than he wanted to admit. When Russo left him he felt a peculiar abandonment, an impotent isola-

tion. He wanted answers that were not available, and he did not know where to turn to look for them.

Fighting an exasperated dissatisfaction, Jay Jay Russo left the Big C central office. When the Newark police had reported the connection between Forbes Adams death and the Pugaliese Bag Man, Russo's hope had been kindled. It seemed like exactly the lead he had been looking for. Now with Adams' murder and Hawley's accident, the door was slammed in his face again. Unless Johnny Dee had his hooks in others of the Big C personnel. Which could take long, hard effort to uncover.

The great difficulty of investigating the *Cosa Nostra* was that old law of silence and the composition of the organization. Spies and informers were the principal tools by which the Bureau ran down other criminals, but it was nearly impossible to infiltrate *Cosa Nostra,* because every soldier, every least button man had to be introduced by someone already recruited who was either a relation or who had known the candidate from babyhood. All Italian neighborhoods had always been clannish and suspicious; the word for *enemy* in Sicilian was the same as that for *stranger,* and no man whose life history was not unimpeachable in the definition of the gangsters could ever go through the blood swearing ceremony that bound the member into the brotherhood. Italian though he was, a cop's son had no chance at all of getting inside. Jay Jay Russo could only work by a slow piecing together of revealed facts as they surfaced.

In his own mind Russo was certain that Johnny Dee backed by the Bag Man had sentenced Adams to death. People like the underling Contino did not go around killing, especially legitimate businessmen, unless they had orders to do so.

So why Adams? Had the purchasing agent been bribed to buy that olive oil and soap powder and then tried for a bigger kickback? Had he only borrowed money from the loan shark and balked at repaying it? There had to be a reason for the hit, and the only way to find it was to back-

track. Russo had the necessary patience for the job, you had to have it to get anywhere in the Bureau, but this search would have been so much easier if Mrs. Adams had not gone off to the West Coast. For instance she would know where her husband had banked.

He visited Grace Turner that evening in her apartment, heard her story as Dearborne had already told it to him, and learned only one new item. She told him Dan Hawley had banked at a branch near the warehouse. He accepted the fact that death had been accidental but he would not overlook the possibility that the assistant had been involved in the boss's racket connection. He had no trouble with that interview. Most women warmed to Jay Jay, sometimes uncomfortably so, but his tastes did not run to this overblown voluptuousness, and he got away after playing blind to a rather forlorn hint at her availability, and cautioning her against mentioning his visit to anyone.

One question which he kept to himself pointed to there being more than one party to the game at Big C. If Adams had been working it alone, if he were the Pugaliese family's only hook in the company, why would they destroy that hook?

In the morning he first looked up the detective, Bud Sanders, who confirmed both Dearborne and the Turner woman, then sought out McHale at the Jersey City warehouse. The man was busy supervising the unloading of a Wade Brothers' truck of soap powder and Russo waited until that was finished, then asked his questions, watching closely for reactions. The superintendent showed no more nervousness than the average citizen when confronted by the law. He was eager to oblige but apparently genuinely knew nothing helpful except that Forbes Adams, like Hawley, had used the branch bank, and volunteered that he, too, used it. On the surface, at least, he was clean, but Russo phoned his office anyhow on the way to the bank and asked that a make be compiled on McHale.

At the bank he went over the records of all three accounts. Adams' history there was as regular as clockwork. He had deposited a pay check at two week intervals, put ten percent into a savings account, the rest into a regular checking account. His expenditures were extremely even,

more even than most. He had been paying on his house and the bank held the mortgage. There had been no out-of-pattern withdrawals nor any extraneous deposits. If he had been under undue financial pressures he had concealed it from everyone at the bank.

McHale's records were normal back as far as his promotion into his present job, when there had been a predictable jump in income. Hawley's were more erratic, as if he had gambled some, won a little, lost a little or bought and sold something in a limited way outside his job, but again there was no suspicious rise in income.

Empty-handed there, Russo turned his attention back to Adams. He wondered if the man might have kept the kickback money in cash, hidden in his home. He called Jason Dearborne and had him get Mrs. Adams' California address from Clarence Howe on the pretext of needing employee insurance information from her. He phoned her that evening, talked to her about the threatening calls her husband had received, then asked her permission to enter the New Jersey house. It might be, he suggested, that Adams had left some notation that could give the police a clue in their search for the murderer. She agreed to wire the permission.

When the wire arrived in the morning Russo took a local officer with him to the house. It was a split level, rambling place on an acre of landscaped ground well screened by shrubbery. When they opened the door the interior was a shambles. Cupboards stood open, drawers were pulled out of chests and strewn through the rooms. Whatever of value that was not bulky and that Mrs. Adams had not taken with her was gone. The woman's closets were empty and she surely had not taken her full wardrobe. Adams' closet was empty, although she might have given away his things before she left. Silver, bric-a-brac, which should have been good pieces to judge by the furniture were absent. The place had been cleaned. There was no wall safe and there was no money, nor any notations.

It could be coincidence. But the house had been empty only a few days and presumably Mrs. Adams had visited it since the murder to pack for her trip. The robbery detail

was called and Russo stayed to follow their inspection. The results of the print lifting would take some time and he could not hope to see them before the next day.

Dan Hawley still bothered Russo. On an outside chance, he went to the apartment house where the assistant had lived, identified himself to the manager, and asked to see the rooms if they had not already been vacated. They had been stripped, the man said, and muttered about police harassment. The cops had been over the place once, late on the same afternoon Hawley died. Why didn't they get together and not keep pestering people?

Yes, they were plainclothesmen. Yes, they had showed their identification and badges. They were from the central station and had signed the manager's authorized entrance book before he would let them in. He had gone in with them, two men, Italians, not exactly storm troopers, but cop types all right. They had looked into everything, but he was sure they had not taken anything. He had watched them like a hawk. One queer thing. They had given him five bucks for his trouble on their way out. That wasn't like a cop.

At the central station neither the badge numbers nor the identification of the two men was on record.

The rest of the week turned up nothing at all. The prints from the house were all either Adams' or his widow's. The make on McHale found nothing more ominous than a clutch of traffic tickets, well spaced out, the fines paid on time.

Jay Jay Russo went home disgusted and discouraged. All he knew for certain was that both of the dead men's residences had been illegally searched.

He lived in an east side apartment with his mother and his ten-year-old son. The apartment was a converted brownstone, eight units in the building, two on each floor. For once the smells of garlic, peppers, and sauce that met him at the door did not tempt him. He had no appetite that night. The noises of the television told him that James Junior was watching Star Trek, which usually amused and relaxed him. Tonight it was another irritation.

Jay Jay's mother was almost as tall as her son, with the same penetrating blue eyes and blonde hair that had now

faded to a lifeless gray which she made no attempt to retouch. She carried herself proudly, a defensive shield against the troubles that had beset her and the nagging fear that went back to her wedding day of the dangers attendent on her husband's and now her son's profession. The one had been murdered. Her heart knew that the other would also die for his work. In the corridor doorway to the kitchen she met him with a darting survey and a smile that long practice made appear easy.

"I'd about given you up as lost." She said it in Italian, saw his annoyance and switched to English. "You look tired."

He shucked out of his coat, grunting. "Disgusted is closer to the word."

She took the coat, folded it over her arm, and smoothed it in a caress that was for the man, not the fabric, backed into the kitchen and called through the door to the living room. "Time to wash up, Jimmy, your father's home."

There was no answer and Jay Jay walked into where the boy perched on the ottoman, tensed forward toward the television set.

"You heard Big Mama, why don't you answer?"

"In a minute." The voice came disassociated from the boy's attention. "I'm watching,"

"How much longer?"

The boy shrugged absently. Jay Jay looked at his watch, saw that the show was almost over, and crossed to rumple his son's hair. The youngster would not be tall and he was light boned, his hair was in crisp black curls and his eyes large, dark, missing nothing.

"All right, Sport, but wash as soon as it's finished."

He got an absent nod and retired to the kitchen, sounding as absent as his son. "You know, he looks more like Marie every day."

His mother ignored that comment. She had not liked Marie, had not approved of the marriage. The girl's mother was Italian but her father was English and a Methodist to boot, and Beatrice Russo blamed her daughter-in-law for breaking up the marriage three years earlier on the grounds of incompatibility when the truth to see was that Marie just did not have the stomach for the tension of liv-

ing with a law man. On the subject of Jimmy she was divided. The boy had elected to stay with his father and she was glad to have him in the home, but it was not natural for a mother to let anyone take her child from her.

Jay Jay sensed the antagonism, patted his mother's shoulder, pointed to the stove, and smiled his twisted smile.

"You spoil me too much, Mama."

"You work too hard. You're too thin. Go wash." She busied herself with feeding spaghetti into the boiling water, stirring it as it sank to the bottom of the kettle.

Jay Jay went off toward the bathroom dutifully. His mother never asked him what he had done during a day and he never told her. Not that she would intentionally talk about it, but most of her friends were Italian and a word dropped could be repeated somewhere that it should not be. Coming back toward the living room he heard the sound come up as the commercial began, then it was flipped off and Jimmy passed him, heading for the basin.

Jay Jay continued on to the dining area and sat down, suddenly acutely conscious of how lonely he was, how empty was his personal life. His only associations these days were work oriented, mostly Bureau men, who were a close clique drawn together not necessarily by any liking for each other but because they could not talk freely to anyone outside.

He had little companionship with his son, who was going to be the first man to fly by Mars, along with running a fish ranch from a glass house on the sea bottom, was involved with scouting and school projects enough to make his father dizzy. This evening Jimmy rushed the grace and ate ravenously, between bites talking steadily about the afternoon's stick-ball game, which Jay Jay was at pains to be fascinated with, then the boy closeted himself in his room with homework.

Beatrice stalwartly refused to let Jay Jay help in cleaning up the dishes and he roamed aimlessly around the apartment. There was nothing on television he cared to watch. He was too restless to read, and he could think of no one who would be good company or on whom he wanted to inflict his present mood.

Jason Dearborne came to his mind. Jason had given him his apartment phone number and insisted on Jay Jay calling him the moment there was any news. Well, there was no real news, but he might use the excuse of reporting on the burgled residences, and he did feel free to discuss this case with the Conglomerated president. If Jason were there. Then he remembered a remark the man had made to the effect that he would be on call at any time because his girl was in Vegas getting a divorce.

It was almost two weeks since Forbes Adams had been shot and Russo had not talked to Dearborne since the first interview. Because nothing had changed. The bug was still on the D & D Sales agency phone but nothing of the slightest value had come through. His office kept hearing murmurs from the underworld that there was family trouble in the making but nothing concrete had surfaced on that score.

He was getting nowhere, but Dearborne would probably appreciate hearing even that by this time, and Russo liked the president, his methodical mind and his quick grasp of the *Cosa Nostra* picture, which was a new field to him.

He dialed the number, waited through four rings, then hung up and dialed again. The way the system was working now he might have reached a wrong number. This time the phone rang three times and he was on the point of giving up when Jason's voice said, "Hello." It was breathless as if Jason had been running.

"This is Russo. What did I get you out of?"

"I was just coming in . . . heard the phone from downstairs. You've got some news?"

"Not to speak of, but if you aren't busy I'd like to rap with you for a while."

"Fine. Come on over."

"Be there in about half an hour."

Was it coincidence or ESP, Dearborne wondered, that Russo had called him this evening. He did not have the agent's home address or phone, and had intended trying to reach him in the morning. He hung up without mentioning it. It would be better to talk about his discovery face to face.

He had not had dinner and now would not take the time to cook, which he usually enjoyed. He went to the small kitchen, built a pitcher of martinis, and while it was chilling made himself a cold roast beef sandwich and took both on a small tray to the living room. He had barely kicked off his shoes and sat down to relax when the phone rang again and Edy's voice sang across twenty-five hundred miles.

"Hi Darling, Hi Darling, Hi-low."

He said hello, garbled by the bite he had not yet swallowed. There was a moment's silence, then she said, "Whatever are you doing?"

"Eating a sandwich, drinking a drink."

"And talking with your mouth full. Ugh. Hey, Darling, I've just had a brilliant idea. I've only got one more week of this freaking exile, so why don't you fly out and I'll show you the dam and we can be married here as soon as I get my divorce."

"Uh-uh." He washed the bread down with the drink. "I'd like to, but there's a problem here. I can't take the time."

"Can't take the time to come to your lonesome-hearted baby? Can't take the time to fix yourself a decent dinner? What *is* going on?"

"No time for dinner because there's a man coming here in a few minutes, and . . ."

"A man?" It was a laughing shriek. "Jason Dearborn, what are you telling me? Why is a man coming to your apartment? A woman I could understand."

"You told me no women, remember? And the man is an FBI agent." He smiled at her teasing and played her game. "Strictly not my type."

"Oh? What type is he? Mine?"

"I hope not. A big, young, blond Italian god with a broken jaw. Looks like Pan without the goat legs and thinks like another accountant."

"Yummy. Hold onto him until I get there. By the way, what have you done to bring on the FBI?"

"He's part of my problem. It may not have made the papers out there, but our Jersey purchasing agent was murdered two weeks ago and Russo thinks it was a gang

killing. It appears we are buying products from a *Cosa Nostra* family."

"Big C is? You've got to be kidding. I'll bet Howie is having hemorrhages."

"Howie doesn't know about it. Russo doesn't want me to tell him yet, afraid he'll rock the boat before we can find out what's going on."

"Oh my," she said. "You do have a problem. If Howie's new president is playing with gangsters behind his back, he is not going to be happy."

"I know. But don't you go behind my back and tell him."

"All right. But I think it's a horribly funny situation, your stores mixed up with mobsters and murder and you caught somewhere in the middle."

Horrible he could agree with, but funny . . . no, not when he remembered Mary Adams' wounded eyes. The door buzzer sounded and he told her he had to go, that Russo was outside.

"Take care, and phone me when you know what flight you'll come in on. I love you."

"I love you, too. And Jason, I didn't mean to be flip. You take care. Gangsters scare me. Don't do anything dangerous."

He rang off and answered the third buzzing and stood aside for Russo to come in. While the agent put his hat on the chair beside the door Jason went for another glass and poured fresh drinks for them both.

"Maybe you're psychic, coming tonight," he said. "Something turned up that I was going to call you about tomorrow."

"I could use something." Russo's gloom told in his tone. He accepted and tasted the drink gingerly, a man who preferred wine and not too much of that. "I mean I could use a break. What turned up?"

Dearborne waved him to a chair, sat down beside his tray, and picked up his sandwich. "Dinner. Can I get you something?"

Russo said that he had eaten and sat back, his eyes hooded down by the long lashes, waiting patiently until Dearborne had wolfed the food.

"Now," Jason said. "It's been two weeks since Adams was killed. I was out of town today, in Albany. Our branch up there is having some labor trouble and asked for help in blowing it down. I didn't get back until nearly six but I stopped by the office to pick up mail and messages. My secretary was already gone, most of the personnel was. My phone was ringing. It was our manager in White Plains. He'd been trying to get me all day. There was a note from Tinker that he'd been calling and then asked me to return his call when I came in . . . he was getting a runaround, he said, from our temporary purchasing agent here. We don't have a permanent replacement for Adams yet . . . and when Clarence Howe was running things he had encouraged the managers to come to him directly if normal channels weren't functioning satisfactorily. Any big organization or government has snafus in communications, as you know.

"So I told him I'd be glad to help if he'd tell me what was wrong. He said that about three weeks ago one of his regular customers, a woman he had known for at least two years and who had never before made a complaint, had brought back a half empty box of Big C soap powder and said it was no good. She's been using the brand right along but this box was different from the previous product, not half as effective.

"He gave her back her money and told her he would investigate it, then sent the box back to the warehouse with a request that it be passed on to the lab for analysis. He didn't hear any more about it until yesterday. A new shipment had come in the first of the week and another customer brought back a package of that.

"Mendel, the White Plains man, phoned the warehouse and talked to Scriven, the temporary purchasing agent, to ask what the lab analysis had been on the first box. Scriven looked in the file and told Mendel there was nothing there about any analysis except the original one on which the contract with Wade Brothers had been made, and said to forget it. He said the women had probably gotten together and bitched to each other, talked themselves into an idea that was not true.

"Mendel didn't like that attitude and phoned the lab

himself. He got hold of a chemist there this morning, who checked the records and found that the lab had sent a *Product Inferior* report to Forbes Adams several days before Adams was killed.

"Normally on a *Product Inferior* alert the purchasing agent would cancel the contract with the producer and close out the stock on hand, discounted to wholesale price to get rid of it without a loss of the cost. Mendel did get an order from Adams to discount the soap powder, no reason given, which there would not have been. He's been discounting it for over two weeks, but the warehouse is still shipping the stuff to him."

A light had begun glowing behind Russo's deep eyes and the crooked smile took the corner of his lips halfway up his face, but there was no change in his methodical approach.

"That does point a pretty sharp finger at Adams working for or with Pugaliese, doesn't it. Tomorrow I'd like a look at that Wade Brothers file."

"And so would I," Dearborne was more emphatic. "Meet me at the warehouse at nine in the morning."

Russo stayed a few minutes more, telling Jason about the burglaries, but his restlessness was gone. He had something to do, a direction to go in, and it could lead him to a breakthrough. He went home and slept a sound, restful sleep.

Jason Dearborne did not sleep well. He worried. It was hard for him to believe that gangsters, powerful though he realized they were, could infect the Conglomerated organization and profit from sales to it. His shoulder muscles were painfully tense when he walked into McHale's office at quarter to nine. Russo was already there and looking enviably fresh and alert.

McHale's greeting was uneasy and it was obvious that the warehouse superintendent suspected he might be blamed for whatever had occurred.

"Mr. Russo's been saying something about a contract that should have been canceled. Wade Brothers. Mr. Dearborne, I don't know anything about it. That would be handled by Purchasing."

"I know." Jason was placating. "We only wondered if

you'd heard it mentioned, if Forbes Adams had said anything to you about it."

"No he didn't, Mr. Dearborne, this is the first time I've heard a thing. We'd better ask Scriven." He started out of his door, still talking. "I want to know what's going on. Scriven is new and I got to stay on top of things. . . ."

He might as well have said aloud that Scriven was not working out in the position, and Jason made a mental note that here was another problem landing in his lap.

They trooped down the long corridor and turned in at Purchasing and found Grace Turner at her desk in the cubbyhole. She looked unhappy and on the defensive until she saw Jay Jay Russo, then her face lighted.

"Good morning, gentlemen. Did you want to see Mr. Scriven? Or me?"

Dearborne flattered her with a direct attention. "Good morning, Miss Turner, I'm glad you're feeling well enough to be back with us. I would like to see Mr. Scriven. We haven't met yet. Is anyone with him?"

"No," she said. "You go right on in. I'll just tell him you're coming."

She used the intercom and the men went toward the office door. Scriven was scrambling to his feet as they went in, plainly nervous at a visit from the President himself. He was a pale, thin, not very young man, sharp nosed, with a small mouth. He glanced at McHale, recognized him, then wavered between Dearborne and Russo, not knowing to which to accord honor. Dearborne introduced Russo and then himself, and the man fawned on him, offering only the one handshake, to Jason.

"We want to find out about the Wade Brothers contract," Jason said. "We hear there have been some complaints about their product."

Scriven's reaction was astonishment that the Top Man would concern himself with trivia, then that an Unauthorized Person should be included in the session. He made a denigrating gesture and said, "Oh, it's nothing, Mr. Dearborne. Nothing. You know we would not make a contract with an unreliable outfit, and I looked up the contract myself. It's there in the files. It's all right."

"If you don't mind," Jason said, "we'd like to see it.

No, don't ask Miss Turner to get it, take us back and show us."

Scriven looked suspiciously at Russo. "If you say so, Mr. Dearborne. . . . Certainly. . . ."

He scooted out from behind his desk and marched officiously back to the file room, held the door open for Dearborne, and then scooted across to the bank of green cases, pulled a drawer open, and found the folder. He spread it on the tabletop and stabbed a finger on the contract.

"There."

Jason reached for it, almost had to pull it from under the finger, picked it up, and saw beneath it the laboratory paper approving the soap sample, and other papers. There was no indication of any cancellation. He said so aloud.

Scriven said, "Why should there be? The laboratory approval is right here."

McHale looked disgusted. "That was of a test made on an original sample. Forbes Adams always ran follow-up spot checks periodically. This contract is fairly new and I'd say he hadn't gotten around to it again before he. . . . If he had and a spot check had been bad he'd sure have canceled."

Russo said softly, "If he were still alive."

Dearborne flicked the paper toward Scriven. "Is there any way to tell who wrote this in the first place?"

"Certainly, Mr. Dearborne, it is initialed, under the company's signature stamp." He peered to read and announced in triumph. "D. V. H. That would be the late Mr. Daniel Hawley." He frowned disapproval. "It is odd that he would make this up personally. The drawing of contracts for the Purchasing Department is a job for clerks."

Russo spoke softly again. "Why don't we ask his secretary about it?"

Dearborne nodded. "Thank you, Mr. Scriven. We'll leave you to replace the rest of this file. And we'll borrow your office for a little while if you've no objection."

The man looked like a crestfallen, bewildered child when they left him alone there. They went back to Grace Turner and asked her to come with them into Dan Hawley's old office. She glanced around the room with distaste and a possessive displeasure at the changes Scriven had

made in it. It's easy comfort was gone, and a rigid placement of furnishings and sterile decor made it cold.

Jason seated her in Scriven's chair and laid the contract before her.

"Do you remember preparing this, Miss Turner?"

She looked it over, reading the interlined typing on the printed form and said yes, she did remember.

"Were you surprised that Hawley should be handling it himself?"

"Well," she said slowly, "yes and no."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, Dan liked to keep things moving and when the girls downstairs were slow in sending our contracts along he'd step in and handle some himself. But this was a single, only the one, and he usually did half a dozen or so at once."

Russo asked, "Do you recall anything else particularly about this one?"

She looked at the paper again, reading the date, thinking back, then her face relaxed with memory.

"I do, yes. He seemed very relieved when the lab report came approving the product, and he was in a terrible hurry to get the contract finished. In fact he kept me overtime, and when it was done and mailed and the copy put in the file, he took me out to dinner. Like a celebration."

"A celebration of what?"

"He didn't tell me. He insisted on buying champagne but when I asked him why he would only say it was a big day, that he'd been having some trouble but that it was now all straightened out."

"What kind of trouble?"

"He wouldn't tell me, he just said it was nothing I should worry my pretty head about, and it was all over anyway."

Jason waited for Russo to ask further questions, but the agent shook his head and Jason thanked the woman and excused her. Russo closed the door behind her and turned back, speaking low, his voice not carrying.

"I think it's pretty clear now that Johnny Dee had a hold on Hawley, probably loaned him money at an exorbi-

tant interest and then put the squeeze on, would let him off the hook if he engineered this contract."

Jason said, "But that doesn't make much sense. It was Adams, not Hawley who was shot."

"It makes very good sense." The agent's lips twisted. "It's the first thing that has. I've been bothered as to why Dee would have Adams hit if Adams was his connection with Big C. That was the last thing he should have wanted. But now. . . . Hawley made this contract . . . I'll want to look at the olive oil contract, too. Now let's project that Adams did make a later spot check on the soap and found it not up to grade."

McHale, a silent watcher all this while, objected. "If he had, Forbes would have canceled Wade Brothers out in a wink. He never would stand for any kind of chiseling, but there isn't any cancellation in that file today."

"No," Russo admitted, "But remember back to the first time we questioned Miss Turner. She told us that the morning of the day Hawley died he went first thing to the file room. Tell me, how would a cancellation have been recorded? Would the notice be stamped on the contract, or what?"

"Not stamped," McHale said. "It would be a typed notation, stapled to the contract. And there would be a notice of cancellation sent to the supplier. A carbon would be with the file. There would also be a report from the lab. None of those things is here."

Russo picked up the contract and held it toward McHale, rubbing his thumb across the top margin. Two pin holes there had been worked on to close them, but they were still visible.

"They may have been here, been taken out by Hawley. Supposing they were, that a notice of cancellation was sent to the Wades. Johnny Dee was their sales agent, they would have screamed to him, I think, and Dee would have put pressure on Hawley to get it rescinded. What do you say Hawley would tell Dee?"

"Knowing Forbes's ways, Dan would have said there wasn't a chance in hell of getting a reinstatement."

"Johnny Dee, the Pugaliese family, wouldn't sit still for

losing the contract that easily. I think Johnny's next move was to try to pressure Adams direct. Mary Adams' three phone calls, the last a threat against her husband's life. I judge that Adams was a hard nose. He wouldn't scare. Dee had him hit."

"My God," said McHale, "They'd kill a man over a damned contract?"

"Losing it would be considered loss of face. They can't afford that. Also, it had an advantage for Dee. With Adams gone, Hawley got his job, would have got it. I think Dee called Hawley after Adams' death and told him to clean out of the file any evidence of a cancellation and take it to Dee. That would account for his being so shaken up and for his actions the next morning. I wish I knew where they made their meet. Then Hawley got drunk. Scared about Adams' death and scared on his own account. A man who never took more than one drink, he got loaded and drove into a truck."

Jason Dearborne sighed deeply. "I wish . . . if that's what happened, Hawley should have gone to the police with what he knew. Why didn't he? Why didn't he go?"

"Fear," said Russo. "That's what keeps Johnny Dee, Pugaliese, the rest of them, operating. Fear. It was simple fear that killed Hawley."

"And Forbes Adams was not afraid." On McHale's heavy face there was an incredulous glaze. "Goddamn them." Then he shook himself free of the morbidity and looked at Jason. "Mr. Dearborne, that contract gets canceled for sure now, doesn't it?"

Jason looked to Russo for the answer. Russo took a slow turn of the room, his head bent, his eyes on the floor.

"Maybe . . . but not quite yet. Positing what I believe was done is not proof of it, and without proof we can't get at them. I want to see the oil contract, then I want to talk to the chemist who made the tests on the soap. Then we'll see."

The olive oil contract was indeed initialed D. V. H. Grace Turner had no specific memory of it. Dearborne and Russo left the office and drove to the laboratory. After a little confusion they were introduced to a chemist, Otto Hammacher, a short, plump man with a balding

scalp and wiry sideburns running all the way down to his jaw hinge. The three were crowded in the small office off the lab. He listened to what was wanted, then went for the records of both oil and soap testings. Spot checks on the oil as recently as six weeks ago noted quality well above minimum requirement. The original soap analysis was average, acceptable. A spot check of the powder dated a week before Adams' death proved a total lack of enzymes although the box bearing the Big C emblem was prominently labeled *Enzymes Added.* Hammacher filled his checks with air and blew it out explosively.

"What they try to get away with. Business people. Such crooks. Not the olive oil people. That's good, honest product. I use it. I like it. It is what they said it is. The soap, that's a gyp."

Russo dropped one eyelid at Jason.

"When you sent your findings over to Adams did you hear anything more about the soap?"

"Hah. Did I. In two days yet. Dan Hawley called and said run another test, make sure I didn't make a mistake. I don't make mistakes. Second test showed no mistake. He said impossible, test of sample six weeks before was okay. I told him I don't make the soap, go call up the Wade company and yell at them."

Russo said, "Do you know what action the Purchasing Department took?"

The chemist's head shook. "What they do there is not my business. It's them make mistakes, still selling that soap. My wife brought it home last week. She didn't know. It was on half-price sale. It should be on no-price sale."

Jay Jay Russo used a small, expensive camera to photograph both soap analyses, they thanked the chemist, and left. Outside, on the way to the car, Jason told Russo of his own worry.

"With this proof that we're selling that junk I think I must tell Clarence Howe before somebody else does and he thinks I'm not doing my job right. I don't want to get fired over a misunderstanding."

"See your point. All right. Let's go tell him now. Is he in town today?"

"He should be. He may not be running the company

any longer but he still comes in most of the time. The old fire horse syndrome, I suppose. I'll phone and find out."

He went back into the lab, reached Howe, and said that he wanted to talk to him and would be there shortly. Howe and Russo met for the first time and Russo did the talking. As Howe listened his old jaw set, his mouth tightened, and his eyes snapped with anger. In the middle of the story he exploded.

"I won't have it. No, by God, I won't. I'm going to write Hoover. Dammit, I'll phone him. And the Attorney General. If need be, by God, I'll go to the President."

Russo looked to Jason for his reaction to the outburst and Jason nodded. The old man could do all of those things. Howe had been a heavy contributor to the party in the last election and could command attention. Russo covered his crooked smile with a hand and then said evenly, "Mr. Howe, I undersand your indignation, but the Bureau is already doing all it can, so is the rest of the Task Force. The only way to get at Pugaliese is to flush them into the open. I have an idea of how that might be done, but there is danger in it to other parties . . ."

"Damn the danger," Howe pounded his fist on the upholstered arm of his chair. "What have you got in mind?"

"Canceling both the soap and oil contracts might . . ."

"Damn right we'll cancel."

Howe made a grab at the phone but Russo touched it first and kept his hand on it.

"Listen to me, please, Mr. Howe. Consider that Forbes Adams has already been killed. They won't hesitate to kill again to have their way. If the cancellations are made through the Purchasing Department, whoever does it will be in jeopardy."

Howe shoved his back against the chair and glared at the agent. He started twice to speak, and stopped, and then shouted. "I'll do it myself. Let them kill me. I'm old enough to die anyhow. And what good would that do them?"

"It might," Russo said softly, "influence Mr. Dearborne here to make concessions. Would it, Mr. Dearborne?"

This talk made Jason feel sick at his stomach. He wondered what he would answer and was not really sure. He

had thought of himself as having as much courage as the average man, but confronted with the idea of those mobsters, this pervasive *Cosa Nostra* who had no more regard for human life than a butcher for the life of a hog, a weakness filled him. His face felt stiff as he looked at Howe. The old man had turned his glare on his new president. Jason waited for the words that must come out of him, as if the words had control of him, not he of them. He did not know what they would be.

Howe said, "Jason?"

The words said, "I'll sign the cancellations. I am supposed to be president."

Russo said, "When you do, I'll deliver the one to the Wades. I want to talk to them."

Jason Dearborne said, "I'll go with you. I want to hear what they say."

seven

THERE WERE OTHERS than the Task Force, Jay Jay Russo, and Jason Dearborne who were angry over the doings of the Pugaliese family. On the day Dearborne and Russo started for the Wade plant with the cancellation notice a shining black limousine turned in at Frank Cataffo's big estate east of Sands Point on Long Island.

The car was expected. The heavy iron gates across the paved drive swung open electrically, and the car purred on and stopped before the house set back out of sight from the highway.

Frank Cataffo came out onto his front porch to meet the four men from the car. By accident this was his eightieth birthday, but he knew they were not here to celebrate with him. None of them would have that long a memory even if they were sentimentally inclined. He had not been told why they wanted to come visiting, only that it was important.

For all his age Cataffo stood as erect as he had forty years back when he had been one of Joe (the Boss) Masseria's lieutenants, and the deep carving of his long face showed none of the emotions that the sight of these men set loose inside him. He stood receiving and returning the kisses in turn of Frederico Denapole of Brooklyn, Vito

Antonucci of Queens, Santino Fabizzi of the Bronx, and Norman Visconti of Richmond.

"I am honored," he said after each kiss, because his guests were among the most powerful Dons of the *Cosa Nostra*. "I am proud that you think enough of an old man to remember his birthday." It amused him to watch them try to hide their surprise. Frederico Denapole was first to recover himself and, as the head of the largest family in the New York area, being speaker for the group he said, "We come with respect."

Cataffo bowed his acknowledgment of the homage but his stubby fingers lifted to brush across the deep-dimple scar in his cheek. The bullet had entered his open mouth and passed through the cheek without even breaking a bone. He was one of the few gang leaders who had been marked for death and yet survived.

It was sheer accident that the shot had missed and it had cost him dearly to stay alive. He had been a man of business more than a man of violence. Of course he had killed, for no man rose in the old Mafia until he had made his bones, but when violence stood in the way of business he had done his best to avoid it. And he had been a successful businessman, owned gambling houses in Miami, Kentucky, Louisiana, Las Vegas.

He had never really wanted to head a *Cosa Nostra* family, but had had to step into Vincent's position when that Don was forced to run to Italy, and he had been willing to step down when Vincent returned. But Vincent did not trust him and ordered him hit. After the button man had botched his job, Cataffo succeeded in convincing Vincent that he wanted nothing more to do with the family rackets by closing his clubs and selling off his points in the Nevada hotels and retiring to his Long Island estate. That had been twenty years ago and he had hardly spoken to anyone in the underworld since, afraid that any interest he showed would be misunderstood as an attempt to move back into power now that Vincent was dead.

It was Denapole who had put on the old Don's shoes when Vincent had his stroke, and these four men had been closely allied with Vincent, so this visit would have wor-

ried Cataffo a few years ago. Seldom did this many leaders gather in one place since the Apalachin disaster, when more than a hundred met for a high level conclave and then scattered like frightened quail, running through the woods when the New York State Troopers put up a road block to trap them. He had not been invited to that meeting, being completely inactive in the families' affairs, and being still inactive he did not understand the meaning of this visit. But he did not ask. He ushered the four inside and proposed the traditional toast with yellow wine.

"To our friends."

They drank ceremoniously, the five thick-necked men who between them had been responsible for countless murders. Then Denapole offered his own toast.

"To the man who has the respect of every leader, every soldier, every member of all the families."

Cataffo was astonished. What did he have, he wondered, that these men wanted? Money was all he had left, and they had plenty enough of that.

"You are too kind." He said it cautiously.

"I speak truth," Denapole insisted. "I do right. Always I do right."

Warily Cataffo said nothing more but motioned for his butler to refill the glasses.

Joe did not look like a butler. He looked what he was, a broken down fighter, a follower who had stayed loyally with Cataffo through the years. Along with Joe, Cataffo kept a driver who was his eyes and ears to glean what he could of family doings, three gardeners, three maids, and one cook. He no longer had a bodyguard, no soldiers or button men, and at the moment he felt uncomfortably exposed.

He sat waiting. His guests waited too. No one appeared anxious to bring up what must be a painful subject. Finally Vito Antonucci could stand the suspense no longer and blurted, "Maybe you heard about the Pugaliese ratfink?"

It was all over gangland that Julio was thumbing his nose at the *commissione*.

"A little," Cataffo admitted.

Denapole took back his role of spokesman. "We got to

do something. We can't let that bastard get thinking he is so big he can ignore the others."

"That could lead to trouble," Cataffo agreed.

"So we come to you, old friend."

He could only stare at them, unable to disguise his disbelief. Now it was out. They were in deep trouble indeed. The whole structure of the underworld so painfully developed forty years ago by Maranzano was being threatened because a single stubborn man refused to be bound by the edicts of the *commissione.* They did not know how to bring him to terms without starting a gang war that would endanger all of their operations. They were here to ask his advice and help, the man they had ousted from his business, the one they had forced out of his clubs and hotel points.

A long banked fire of bitterness flared up in Frank Cataffo. He wanted to shout at them to go to hell, to kill their own snakes. It would be a sweet revenge to sit back and watch Pugaliese pull the *Cosa Nostra* apart. It would make up a lot for the years of exile from his world.

But it was still his world, the institution he had helped Maranzano found. He had been one of the first men "made" by the new organization, Maranzano personally had pricked his trigger finger so he could sign the roll in blood. That had been a long time ago and a lot had happened since 1930. He had been shocked when Luciano gunned down Maranzano, shocked when Dewey got Charley Lucky deported, shocked when Genovese had Anastasia hit, and when the same Don had tried for Costello. But in spite of all the events and the time, he was still of the *Cosa Nostra.*

His heritage ran back to his beginnings when he was born into the old Mafia, nurtured on its crimes, had seen his father and two uncles killed by the police before he escaped to a strange land and found friends along One Hundred and Seventh Street. His first job in America had been breaking the window of a jewelry store. He learned to burglarize lofts, to steal guns from pawnshops. He and three friends had hijacked one of Dutch Schultz's liquor convoys out of Canada, and that put him in business.

There were five falls on his rap sheet, for assault, burglary, carrying concealed weapons, rape, and receiving stolen property, but all arrests were prior to Prohibition. Once he had money for payoffs he was never busted again.

His help was needed now, but what could he do? Frustration made him loud.

"Why me? I've got no army, got no political pull, got nothing with the police. I've got nothing at all."

Propelled by his bitterness he stood up, spread his arms wide, and looked down on them—a giant who had been stripped of everything of value in life.

"What do you think I have?"

"Respect," Fred Denapole said. "You have more respect than anyone."

"Once I had. But now . . . ?"

"Now. The families will listen to you. The families will trust you."

Well, he had kept the rules, had never had another leader hit, had never tried to steal another's territory or racket, had never taken another's woman. Nor had he ever broken the *Omerta,* even when the bullet had torn through his cheek and the cops had grilled him for hours. They had found a list of figures that matched the take for the previous week from one of the Vegas hotels, but although they had hammered at him he had not broken and they could not prove that some of the points credited under a dummy name were really his. That was how a man built respect, it was what the families understood. But it had all been a long time ago. . . .

Denapole was talking, angry, telling about Tough Tony Pugaliese trying to muscle in on the California family and the command that he appear before the *commissione,* his flight east into his father's protection, the command that the Bag Man either produce his son or appear himself, and that insulting message with its insulting excuse.

"He's got no call to snoot us that way. If a Don won't respect the *commissione* who the hell will? How do we handle it?"

Cataffo said, "Tell him again to send Tony."

"Oh, sure, and have him weasel out of it again. Then we're up against it. We'd have to act."

"Yes, you'd have to hit him. You can't let him get away with it."

That was what they wanted most to avoid. The Jersey family was very strong and under Julio Pugaliese's leadership they had good paying rackets, many of them in partnership with the New York families. Those would be lost immediately if Julio died. But somehow Pugaliese must be taught that he could not ignore the *commissione*.

Denapole explained to the old man who had been out of the swim so long he probably did not know what a mix of alliances was in the balance.

"Maybe," he said, "if you talked to him? Even the Bag Man has respect for Cataffo."

The long, withered mouth turned down in a thin bow and the voice held an accusing petulance. "A nobody . . . who would listen to a ghost?"

"You will not be a ghost." Denapole indicated the other men. "We have been talking with the Dons and the *commissione*. They agree that the organization needs change. We have all been equals since Maranzano put it together. What Pugaliese is doing is putting himself above us. We do not want him above us. To stop him we think we must have someone at the top, in the place he wants to be, but we cannot get a choice among the present Dons. There is only one man all of us will accept. You will be the *capo di tutti capi.*"

Frank Cataffo sat down abruptly, as stunned as if he had been pole-axed. *Capo di tutti capi?* Boss of the bosses? Acknowledged ruler over the whole *Cosa Nostra?* Head of five thousand button men, of the twenty-four families, with the power of life and death over every member? They were frightened crazy.

No one had ever successfully established himself as absolute boss of the *Cosa Nostra*. Maranzano had tried first and been killed for the audacity. Luciano had been too smart to reach, preferring to extend his influence across the spectrum of crime by making alliances not only with the families but also with the Irish and Jewish mobs. Then Genovese had killed and killed to climb up there until the Federal authorities had locked him up.

And Frank Cataffo who for so many years had had no

place at all in the brotherhood was being voluntarily offered the most powerful place in the underworld, perhaps the most powerful place in the world?

A battle of emotions brought tears stinging his old eyes. Such an elevation he had never dreamed of. But the offer was not a joke. He was indeed the only person who had no longer any enemies in the organization, whose nomination would not be contested by some suspicious or jealous Don. His blood stirred at the thought of commanding men again and of the recognition so long denied him. The satisfaction of the offer itself was heady enough, the justification of his life style.

He knew they had not come out of love for him. They were offering the title as insurance for themselves. If they moved against Pugaliese as individuals they would be targeted by him and there was the risk that the Bag Man might breach their ranks and draw defections to his side. But if one man trusted by all others led the disciplinary action their solidarity would be more secure. He would be a symbol, a figurehead.

But there was enormous danger. If he accepted and ordered Pugaliese to appear before him and the Bag Man still defied the command, he would have no option to having the rebel hit. That would start a war, and the Jersey soldiers would concentrate on wiping Cataffo out to prove they were strong enough to deny all authority other than their own.

Common sense told him to refuse the honor. The instinct for survival that had kept him alive through the years when so many died was still strong. He had all the money he would ever need, more than a hundred men could spend. He had all the creature comforts that normally are the only pleasures of a man in his eightieth year. But man is a herd animal and the herd known as *Cosa Nostra, Our Thing,* was compellingly Cataffo's "thing." He was an old bull pushed aside by younger studs and now being recalled by the threatened herd to protect it.

They were waiting for him, not dissembling their anxiety. Unaware of it, his forefinger probed the whole in his cheek.

"If you are sure," he said. "I will speak for you, but I

will need guards who can be trusted. I think Julio will not be convinced by my shaking my finger at him."

From that day on, the Long Island estate would change from a quiet country home resting serenely at the edge of the Sound. Before night it would become a bristling fort and a command post from which to engineer a possible war.

eight

THE WADE BROTHERS' SOAP COMPANY plant was bordered on one side by Foxglove Creek. The stream had once been crystal water running swiftly over a sand and pebble bed with trout lying close along the bottom or darting after larvae as the tiny worms swept past. Now it was a sluggish sewer, opaque, thick, dirty yellow, filled with trash and stinking the neighborhood. The smells from the soap vats inside the factory made the area a noxious place. The parking lot occupied the space between the creek and the building. Jay Jay got out of the car, looked down on the scum that whorled slowly in a pattern of froth, and held his nostrils closed.

"God, what they do to this country. I had an uncle who ran a chicken farm not three miles from here and my Dad used to bring me out fishing. Can you imagine eating a fish caught out of that?"

"You're not likely to have to," Jason Dearborne said. "I doubt a fish could live in it." He locked the car and turned with Russo toward the building.

On the drive here they had side-tripped to stop at the Task Force's office in a former bank building in Jersey City to talk over the plan with Robert Maxwell, the special

counsel in charge. Maxwell was an ex-United States Attorney from the southern district of Illinois who had studied gangsters and their methods in depth.

He listened to Russo's recitation of what they had learned, what they surmised, and what they intended doing, watching Dearborne covertly, playing a half dollar back and forth across the back of long, elegant fingers. That little action kept Dearborne's attention on the hand rather than on the man's face, and Jason was not aware that he was being measured. When Russo finished, Maxwell said, "What do you think you'll get out of seeing the Wades?"

"I want to scare hell out of them and see if we can make them talk about Johnny Dee."

"I wish you luck. But even if you are able to nail Dee, we'll have a job tying him back to Pugaliese."

"You're telling me." Russo spoke for Dearborne's benefit. "These bastards are organized so that nothing can be traced to a leader no matter who else gets busted. And we know there's a fund kept to take care of any member's personal family if he's sent up for any length of time."

"Speaking of leaders," Maxwell said quietly, "there's a meet in progress out on Long Island at this minute. I wish I knew what it meant."

Russo said, "What meet? Where?"

"Denapole, Antonucci, Fabizzi, Visconti, visiting Frank Cataffo, all together."

"Oh? How do you know?"

"We've had a tail on Denapole for weeks, trying to break that waterfront killing. Our man phoned in for instructions when he realized who was with Denapole and where they were going."

"Mother." Russo sounded imploring. "I wish I could hear what's being said. I wish we had Cataffo's place bugged."

Maxwell lifted his shoulders, also regretting the omission, and sounded sour. "As far as we know, Cataffo is still clear out of it. He hasn't shown anywhere for twenty years."

Sighing, not believing what he said, Russo tried to take the edge off disappointment. "Maybe it doesn't mean anything. Maybe they're just saying hello to the old man."

Maxwell tossed his coin on his desk. "And maybe I'm Queen of the May. They never in their lives did anything they didn't stand to gain from. If it were my say-so, I'd have the place raided and take them all in. There's nothing that upsets a mobster quite as much as being picked up even if he makes bail in ten minutes."

Jason Dearborne said, "Why shouldn't you?"

Maxwell raised his eyes without lifting his bent head and spread his powerless hands. "New York says no. They don't want Denapole to get the idea he's being watched; they hope he'll make a slip somewhere."

Jay Jay Russo grunted and rose. "Well, I hope Pugaliese slips but I'm about to give up. If we can't jar something out of these Wade characters I think I'll resign."

Maxwell favored him with a tight smile, knowing him too well to take the threat seriously, but as they left and got back in the car Dearborne asked anxiously, "Did you mean that, about resigning?"

"Oh hell," Russo pulled his door closed harder than necessary, "I'm human. Even a cop has to blow his cool once in a while."

Jason Dearborne waited until they had joined the slow flow of heavy traffic, then he asked, "Who are those men you were talking about back there?"

"What men? Oh, in the meeting at Cataffo's? Just four of the Dons of the New York families . . . hey . . . I wonder. . . ."

Dearborne did not interrupt the train of thought obviously going through the agent's head. He appeared to have some new theory and wanted to test it before he spoke of it aloud, and it took him a long minute before he looked across at Jason.

"There are five families in New York and the Pugaliese bunch in Jersey, but because they're so close, and we believe they interact, we group them as six families in this area."

He paused and this time Jason nudged him with a word. "So?"

"So why should four Dons go calling on Frank Cataffo? Why not all six? And why now? Cataffo was a big shot in the old days, then somebody tried to kill him and the talk was that he cleared out, agreed to unload his clubs and points in the Vegas Strip hotels, retire to puttering around his flower gardens if they wouldn't hit him again. Why would four Dons make a special trip out to see him after all this time?"

Jason thought of a possible reason and said innocently, "Maybe it's his birthday."

"It could be his name day, but that doesn't explain why only four would celebrate it instead of six."

"I don't follow you there."

"It's out of your line. Yes. When you watch the underworld closely you notice little things, because there is an overall pattern. If you see boys from one family moving in another family's territory it tells you that one of two things is happening. Either there's an agreement that the racket will be shared peacefully, or you can expect war. When four Dons get together it's an event; they don't meet in numbers without a purpose. So suppose this indicates a split, with four families lining up on one side and Pugaliese and the Ciacioha mob, a New York family, joining up on the other side, since neither of those is represented in today's party."

Jason Dearborne translated such an alignment into his picture of the legitimate business world and found it fit well with companies sharing sales territories or buying, merging, consolidating to lessen competition and achieve a dominance. Business was crammed with historic stories of raids and attacks that were indistinguishable from a mob's maneuvering.

"But," he said, "If Cataffo is retired, and he must be near eighty from what I've read about him, what could the four expect from him?"

Russo was thinking just ahead of his words. "I'm guessing, but when there's trouble in the *Cosa Nostra* and the *commissione* can't handle it, sometimes they use a neutral mediator. Cataffo looks right in that role, he's clear out of the rackets so neither side should have much reason to distrust him. There are rumors of some sort of rumble, and if

there isn't a split why aren't Pugaliese and Muro Ciacioha with the others?

"Gangsters are a lot like women about a get-together. A woman is afraid not to attend because she knows her friends will gossip about her if she isn't there. A gangster doesn't like to be left out for fear someone is plotting against him. He's suspicious of everyone, doesn't trust anybody. When a bag man is used there are checkers watching him until he turns the skimmings over to the broker, then the broker is watched. Nothing is ever taken for granted. Everything has to be explained. If it isn't, someone gets nervous."

They had reached the Wade plant and there was no more time for Dearborne's education into the mob's mores. The parking lot was crowded. Russo forgot about the creek and fish and scanned the cars and said with satisfaction, "Looks like they're running full blast. Good. The more soap they've got on their hands the more it's going to hurt them when you cancel."

They pushed the glass door open and went into the tiny lobby. Four girls sat at desks in a fenced off space beyond and a fifth operated a switchboard beside a gate in a banker's partition. Jason Dearborne laid his card at her elbow, and when she looked up he asked to see one of the Wades. She read the card, was impressed by the title, and took it at once back to Frank Wade's office.

"Two gentlemen to see you," she said and leaned to put the card in front of him on the old-fashioned, scarred desk, then waited to hear whether to admit them.

Frank Wade had been dictating into a recorder. He glanced at the card, choked, read the engraved words again in an instinctive hope that he had misread them the first time. They still spelled, Jason Dearborne, President, Conglomerated Stores. He shoved his chair back as if from a lighted bomb and was barely able to tell the girl to send the men in.

Frank Wade was already a very frightened man, had been so ever since Forbes Adams' death and Dee's call to Larry to say the contract was okay. From the first he had suspected Dee of being something more than a sales agent and had put the two items together in his mind. In initial

panic he had thought of abandoning the whole business and going somewhere in a hurry, had even urged the idea on Larry. Larry had been shocked by the murder but when Johnny Dee told him that Big C had agreed to continue buying the soap, he had accepted it, changed the formula back to its original form, and told his cousin to sit tight, that it would be all right. Frank had continued to worry, but when two weeks had passed and it looked as though they were going to slip past the crisis, he began to relax. It still made him ill to think of the murder but he resolutely blanked it out and buried himself in work.

Now the reckoning was here. Why would the President of Conglomerated come to him personally unless something had been discovered to connect him and Larry to Johnny Dee, to murder.

He could not stand up when the men came in. He looked from one to the other unable to decide which was Dearborne. He could not recall the face in the portrait that had run with the interview in Business Week a month or so back. He chose Russo, cleared his throat to steady his voice and said, "This is an honor, Mr. Dearborne . . ."

Russo had coached Jason to omit normal preliminaries, saying that the quicker they hit the man with the cancellation, the more apt they were to catch him off guard. Jason's voice was cold as Wade half extended a hand toward Russo, a hand Jay Jay pointedly ignored.

"No honor intended, Mr. Wade. I am here to tell you personally that as of today we are buying no more of your product. The contract is nullified. We are returning all of the soap still on our shelves and in our warehouses."

The blow thrust Frank Wade back against his chair and took his breath. Through the wall came the muted noises of the factory making and packaging soap at top speed. The market for it yanked out from under him. The returns would inundate them. He put a hand on his forehead; there was no use pretending that he was not stricken, he had cause enough in Dearborne's words. He grabbed at the moment to try to think.

He could argue that the formula had been corrected and that the powder they were boxing now would pass any tests the laboratory wanted to put it through, that the first

batch had been an accidental mistake, at least try to save the contract. But if he admitted knowing about the inferior quality there was danger that they would guess he knew of the earlier cancellation.

He floundered, fumbling the words that finally came. "You . . . I . . . I can't understand this . . ."

Without speaking Russo held toward Wade the FBI identification card. Wade leaned forward to read it with moving lips, not trusting his eyes alone. In his deepest foreboding he had not seen anything like this. The police questioning him, yes, but not the FBI. The very shape of the letters sent freezing chill through him. He gasped like a fish drowning in air and stuttered.

"Wh . . . wh . . . wh . . . what. . . ?"

Russo slammed words back at him. "Who killed Forbes Adams?"

For a moment Wade honestly did not know who the agent meant and his empty face showed it. Russo said, "The Big C purchasing agent. He canceled your contract over two weeks ago. Don't tell me you didn't know that. But you're still shipping, the soap is still on the store shelves. How come?"

Wade looked to Dearborne and back to Russo, his mouth working but no sound coming from it. Russo threw at him, "You know Johnny Dee?"

Wade registered to that name. It haunted him. But he said sharply, "No."

"Don't lie to me, Wade. D & D Sales Company is your agent with Big C."

Wade's head nodded. He said, "But . . . But . . ."

Russo quit the pounding and switched to a sympathetic tone. "Why don't you start at the beginning and tell us all about it. What's the matter? Has Johnny got his hooks in you? Did he loan you money?"

"No . . . No . . . I never met him. I've never talked to him."

Russo thought that sounded genuine. "But you know who he is."

Wade's head bobbed again. "Yes, through Larry, my cousin." Wade had a sweet, bright flash of daylight. "Larry mentioned him. I run the manufacturing end here,

Larry handles the selling. He owns two thirds of our company, I've only got a third."

Russo thought this too was truth and refocused. "Where is your cousin? In the plant?"

"No, he's in Akron, playing in the Akron Open."

"When will he be back here?"

Wade was immensely grateful to have the fire directed away from him. He breathed a fraction easier and said, "I don't know. He's going from there to Phoenix, where else I don't know."

This time Russo was not convinced. Part of it could be all right, part might be stalling. He was not sure. He paused, filtering the echoes of the voice, trying to locate where honesty left off and craft took over. Wade thought the pause indicated a softening toward him, an uncertainty, and saw a possible chance to extricate himself. He said to Dearborne, "Tell me why you want to cancel our contract. It will ruin us. We've got thousands of pounds boxed, in your boxes."

Dearborne said flatly, "We do not buy from gangsters, Mr. Wade."

A real enough horror contorted the man's face, flushed it, made him explode. "We are not gangsters here, sir. Not for one minute."

"But," said Russo, "Johnny Dee is. A very dangerous one. Your connection with him puts you in a suspect position."

He considered warning Wade for his personal safety, suggesting that he ask for police protection, then did not. If Wade was telling the truth in that he had never talked to Dee, there should be no reason for Dee to attack him. It would be the cousin, Larry, who might be targeted to stop him from telling whatever he knew about Dee.

"The cancellation stands," Dearborne said, "At least until you can prove that your association with mobsters of any kind is firmly broken."

He turned to leave but Russo had a final word. "Mr. Wade, if Johnny Dee learns about this interview, and if he knows where your cousin is, he could be murdered."

During the walk to the car Jason Dearborne felt a cold foreboding and expressed it in an uncertain question.

"Shouldn't there be some way to warn Larry Wade . . . in case. . . ?"

Russo said, "When we get back to town I'll send word to Akron to pick him up and return him here for questioning. For his own safe-keeping and because I want to talk to him as soon as possible."

When they had gone Frank Wade sat at his desk perspiring, hot and then cold, for some minutes, then he got up and rushed to the washroom off his office and retched until he could hardly stand. When he could he wobbled back to his chair, flipped the intercom, and told the switchboard girl to get him an outside line. When the operator answered he put in a person to person call to Lawrence Wade at the Summit Hotel in Akron.

nine

JULIO PUGALIESE had heard nothing about the meeting that afternoon at Frank Cataffo's Long Island home. For years he had despised Cataffo as no more dangerous than a dead cobra. In Pugaliese's book Cataffo had quit, had begged for his life and let himself be strippped of all his rackets without a sign of a fight. Pugaliese could not understand a man like that, and Cataffo was the farthest thing from his mind as he talked with the Ice Pick in the big room off the formal garden.

"That Tony," he complained, "what do I do with him? Where do I put him? I tell him, sit pat until the *commissione* cools down and gets it through their heads there's room enough for him out west. He says he's stir crazy holed up here, that I should get him something to do."

Jerry Konner privately did not believe Tough Tony could handle anything on his own yet, perhaps never would be able. He was not the man his father was. He said, "Might send him to your cousin in Sicily for a while, let him work off his restlessness on a trip."

"Bore the shit out of him," the Don said. "He wouldn't stay. He's independent, like me. And there's those two broads he brought from California sucking him out all the time. He probably wouldn't go if I told him . . . who's that?"

The gate signal made a discrete, low buzz. Jerry switched on the closed circuit television and brought Johnny Dee's fat face onto the screen. The ugly features were uglier with worry. Jerry swung his eyes to the Don for Pugaliese's decision whether or not to see the loan shark. Julio hesitated, then gave a ghost of a nod and Jerry relayed the permission to the guard. Julio prowled the room while they waited, annoyed already with Tony and further annoyed by this interruption, Dee's second visit to the house within three weeks. When the man came in Julio faced him and glared.

"Don't you ask for a meet any more?"

The fat man mopped his face, nodding his head to acknowledge that he was out of order, and wheezed, "No time to ask on this. The soap deal backfired. They canceled again."

The Don's scowl darkened. "Why? The stuff's okay now. Isn't it?"

"Yeah, but Sweet Jesus, today the big shot at Big C goes to Wade and raises hell. He had an FBI crud with him, asking questions about me and Forbes Adams, the guy we hit . . ."

Julio barked at him. "How do you know?"

"Larry Wade, my contact, phoned from Akron. The cousin had called him as soon as the fuckers left."

Julio Pugaliese left Dee, folded his hands behind his back and walked to the windows, looking down the marble aisle, sorting through the meanings of this information, assessing probabilities and possible counter moves. The other two men were silent, not to interrupt the web of thoughts. At length Pugaliese spoke quietly.

"Does the Wade who is not the contact know you? What did he tell?"

"The cousin told Larry he said he didn't know anything about sales, all he knows is manufacturing."

"Do you think that is so?"

"Maybe. I never talked to that one."

Julio came back from the window, looking at Jerry Konner for his view of this new picture, and Konner said in a soft tone, "They are cousins. They work together.

Both know the original contract was killed. Both know Forbes Adams was hit and afterward the contract continued. Did the man here tell the FBI that?"

Johnny Dee was stolidly uncomfortable. "Larry says his cousin didn't talk, didn't say nothing like tthat."

Jerry Konner watched the fat man unblinking. "Let's hope that's right. He can be made to talk if they reach him again. So can the one in Akron."

"That I took care of already," Dee said. "I told him clear out of the country, fast, disappear, if he wants to stay healthy. He believed. He's got shit up to here."

Pugaliese was dissatisfied with this. But it was done. It would be a loose end. It could mean trouble for Johnny Dee if the man should surface somewhere and tell his soap story. Still, the trouble would go no higher in the family than Dee, who would not break the *Omerta*. There was no provable criminal tie between Pugaliese and Dee. It was not a crime for the sales agent to sell Pugaliese oil.

Jerry Konner put his hand on the phone but did not lift it. The hand flashed as sunlight touched the big ruby on his fourth finger. "The Wade back here. Who do we send."

Julio Pugaliese did not answer at once. He said to Dee, "This Wade, do you know where he lives?"

Johnny shook his head.

"What's his whole name?"

"Frank Wade. I don't know about an initial."

"You know if he's married?"

Again Johnny did not know. He felt the Don's displeasure and wished to hell he had never heard of Little Julio's bright idea about soap powder.

"You're getting careless." Pugaliese aimed a rigid forefinger at Dee, blinding him with the diamond the Don wore there. "You watch yourself. You come driving in here, I don't know whether you've got a tail on you or not. You don't do your homework. You go home now. Eat there. Stay there. Don't go out before tomorrow. Anybody's watching you, I want to know where you are. Do not come to this house again. Police don't bother me. FBI is different."

He did not say good-bye, but waved the fat man away with an impatient hand and waited until he heard the car roll out of the drive before he spoke again.

"Feds. Not good. Jerry, if that agent is trying to nail Dee, chances are he's looking to get at me. Have there been any people we don't know on the grounds, somebody who could have bugged us?"

"Not a soul. Not a tingle along the fence, nobody through the gate."

"So . . . look in the phone book, find Wade."

There were two Frank Wades in the area, one in lower Manhattan, one in the perimeter of the soap factory. Jerry Konner chose that one first, dialed the number and when a man answered the Ice Pick affected an acceptable mimicking of a woman operator's voice.

"Long distance calling Mr. Frank Wade of Wade Brothers' Soap Company. Is this Mr. Wade?"

The voice at the other end said, "Yeah . . . Larry, is that you. . . ?"

Jerry Konner depressed the button in the phone cradle, then laid the receiver across it. "He's home."

"Send Zazio and Cini. Tell them to take the whole house, anybody there. Put them in the water so they don't float."

Konner found Zazio at the small Italian restaurant where the trigger man usually ate a dinner around nine o'clock after the other customers had gone. To make a setup he would normally have gone through the channels of the organization ladder, but with an FBI man talking about Johnny Dee and Forbes Adams in one breath that afternoon, time was too short. Wade must be reached before the Bureau could contact him again.

Zazio answered the restaurant phone talking around a mouthful of food.

"This is Jerry," Konner said in his normal voice that was not quite falsetto. "How's the food this evening?"

"Good." Zazio gulped, more from surprise than to swallow in a hurry. "Veal 'n' peppers." The direct call from the House was a shock.

"Come for coffee at the Corner Store. Half an hour."

Julio Pugaliese, too, was startled. "You going yourself?"

Konner said, "Only to set it up. Tonight I don't know . . . there may be a tap on Luigi's line."

The Corner Store was a code that Zazio would be picked up by car in front of the restaurant. He was waiting in the entrance when Konner stopped for him and Konner drove on as soon as Zazio was beside him on the seat. Zazio found it prudent not to say anything in this unusual circumstance. They drove around three blocks while Konner told what was to be done, made certain Zazio understood the address he was to visit, then returned him to the intersection nearest the restaurant.

Zazio walked the short distance to his apartment, made himself ready for work, and took the car licensed in a name other than his around to rout Cini away from his television set. He explained the mission as they headed for the soap factory, passed it, and went on to the rambling white house Frank Wade's father had built two miles further on beside the once lovely creek.

Zazio cut the headlights before he turned in at the drive. Near the house a dog barked. Cini swore, dug out his gun, and fitted a silencer to it. Zazio drove on and turned the car in the circle before the double garage. The dog came out of the bushes snarling and Cini shot it from the window without getting out of the car.

A light went on in the upper story and a man appeared at an open window, calling, "Who is it? Who's down there?" There was so much fear in the voice that it was hard to catch the words, and Cini did not like the noise being made. But the man ducked back before Cini could aim.

Zazio ran for the house corner where the telephone line was stapled against the wall. He cut it just as Frank Wade picked up the instrument inside and shouted for the operator to get the police, quick. Both the men outside could hear him clearly.

"Noisy bastard." Cini kicked in a pane of glass of the French windows on the side porch. He and Zazio went inside.

They crossed the living room and came into a front hallway where a staircase led to the second floor. As they reached the bottom Frank Wade appeared at the top, naked, pulling a shotgun to his shoulder. Cini shot him, twice because of the difficult angle, but both shots were true. Wade dropped the shotgun and pitched forward and fell down the stairs in an awkward tangle.

Above, a woman screamed.

Zazio went up three steps at a time, taking a ball of thin, oiled nylon cord, very strong stuff, from his pocket. He found the woman standing in the upper hall, hands against her face, drawing breath for another scream. He was on her before she could get it out, snubbing the cord around her neck, behind her arms, and twisting the length around the flesh of his hand to tighten it.

The woman choked but terror gave her extra strength and she fought. That helped to kill her. The flailing arms, the turning and tearing to get away made the cord cut into her neck more quickly. She, too, was naked. She quit fighting, her body arched back stiffly, then fell slack as all of her muscles relaxed. Zazio dropped her and jumped back to be clear of the flood of excrement that was released, then hauled her by the cord to the stairs and dumped her down. Horrid odor filled the hall. Zazio gave it no attention. He went through the rooms up there but they were empty of other people. As Cini searched the downstairs Zazio went to the bathroom for towels and water. A cleanup was part of the order of this job. At least he got one break. The floor was hardwood, not carpeted, with only some throw rugs that had not been soiled.

They took the shotgun, the bodies, the towels, through the French doors, swept up the broken glass, gathered in the dog, mopped up most of what blood it had shed and scuffed what remained into the grass until it was not visible. Then they opened the garage. They were in luck to find a station wagon there, even one with a rear door. They did not want to haul the freight in the car they used because the stink would linger for days and there was the chance of some nosy cop getting a whiff of it.

They spread the plastic drop cloth they had brought in the floor of the wagon and piled their load on it, then

turned on the lights to jump the switch wires. The lights shone on a set of panels leaned against the garage walls, heavy iron scrollwork panels painted white which Frank Wade had intended to use as decorative supports for a summer house. Zazio was very pleased.

"Hey," he said. "Those are made for us. We won't have to mix cement."

They added three of the panels on top of the blankets that covered the bodies. Cini drove the wagon while Zazio took the car to rout out Dino for muscle.

It was three in the morning and Dino was surly but obedient, a huge, lumpy mountain of a man. At the wharf they used copper wire rather than rope, which might rot under water and let something come to the surface, to lash everything to the iron panels, and Dino carried them one at a time aboard the fishing boat. When they were disposed of, Cini headed with the wagon for the Newark Airport. Zazio took Dino home and went to pick up Cini in the car. They drove home to Jersey City after dawn, Zazio singing in the voice that would have taken him into opera if his road had been different.

Johnny Dee spent an uneventful night. He lived with an aunt in a second floor apartment off Georgia Street and spent as little time there as he could. He had never married because while he was growing up he had been the fat boy of the crowd, the one everybody, especially the girls, made fun of. He had taken to whores, because they did not mock their customers, for the blow jobs he could not perform for himself. Otherwise, he disliked women generally and hated his aunt. She was nearly ninety, a gaunt scarecrow, a priest-ridden holdover from the Sicilian days who still bulldoggedly wore a shawl over her head and who refused to die. He ate what she put before him, the heavy pastas that were bad for his weight problem but were the staple of her cooking and his favorite food. Then he went to bed and opened his legs to relax himself. After the jolts he had suffered that day he needed a sound night's sleep.

In the morning he waited at the apartment until nearly eleven watching from his windows. When he could see no indication of a stake out he drove to The Tavern and was

certain no one followed him. It was only a temporary relief. The phone under his table rang almost as soon as he sat down and a voice he recognized said, "We got trouble here."

"What?" Johnny Dee's stomach jumped.

"Letter from Big C Stores. No more oil."

The cramping made Dee grab at his belly and gouge his fingers into it. They were throwing out the Pugaliese oil? That fucking Fed agent was behind it for sure. That was bad. He wished now that he had not been in such a hurry to scare Larry Wade into running. He was the only link left which could tie Johnny to the Adams hit, and alive he was a threat. He wished he knew where the man had gone.

"Who sign letter?"

"Jerk named Dearborne. It says he's president."

"Stop sending oil," Dee said, and slammed the receiver.

ten

EDY BULLOCK played gin with her seat partner all through the three hours the plane was stacked up over Kennedy. It kept her hands busy and her mind off personal matters. Then at last they were coming in, the big jet engines whining like a banshee. The cards were put away and the table snapped into its depression. She checked her hair and face in her purse mirror and moved with the group through the tunnel into the boarding room. Clarence Howe and Jason Dearborne were standing outside the rail.

She stepped out of the line and stopped. They had not seen her yet, engrossed in a conversation that must be of more interest to them than her arrival. She had a long moment to study them unobserved and a quick panic swirled through her, the kind of panic she had known at those times just before she ran away from a school.

She had been running from insecurity then, yet of all the people she had ever met Jason Dearborne most epitomized security. Standing there beside her grandfather he was certainly the picture of the man she had always thought she wanted, solid as a concrete block, steady and predictable.

Now those qualities were the source of the panic. He

was so neutral. He showed so little emotion. Whether he over-controlled himself or had nothing volatile inside him she had not figured out. She did not know him well enough to judge. She had gone away assuring herself that given time after their marriage he would relax, and for the past six weeks in Nevada she had pushed doubts away; she would look at them later if they did not evaporate on their own. Now the time of decision was upon her. Jason would want to be married soon, maybe within days, and suddenly she was not ready.

Even when he kissed her as she went through the railing there was no lift to it, no feeling except the physical pressure of his lips. A cold trance enveloped her out of which she could hear and speak but through which she could not project. She kissed her grandfather on his withered cheek and deliberately tried to breathe some life into the reunion.

"I didn't know you were meeting me, Howie. Didn't you trust Jason? I'll bet you've got steam coming out of your ears that we're so late getting in . . . you both look disappointingly serene."

Clarence Howe said, "It's good to have you back, Edy, but do I have to dance a jig to show it?"

She laughed, a high, affected trill, and patted his arm. "I expected to find you all shook up about the gangsters and I don't see a sign of it."

"Who told you about that?"

"Jason did, on the phone. Why shouldn't he? Let me have a little fun too."

"Fun?" The old man roared at her, then lowered his tone but not his vehemence. "Forbes Adams murdered and people disappearing and even the government can't do one damn thing about it, and you call it fun? You sound idiotic. Now I have to leave, I'm late for an appointment. Jason, you take her home in a cab, I need the car."

He went off angry and she watched after him in impatient contrition, impatient with herself for having used the ghoulish word.

"I am a bitch, Jason. I didn't mean it that way. What

makes me say such things?" The question recalled to her an awareness that she could drop her guard and talk simply with this man, and the panic subsided. "Tell me," she said, "what all has happened? Where do things stand now?"

He took her elbow, steering her through the passengers and those meeting them. "Soon as we pick up your baggage."

She gave him her checks. They found little to talk about except her flight while they waited for the bags and got them into a cab. Then he brought her up to date on what little they had learned and what they had done.

"Russo intended to take the Wade cousins before a special Grand Jury to explain their connection with Johnny Dee and his sales agency, but both men have disappeared."

"They ran out?"

"Possibly. Russo thinks otherwise about Frank Wade at least. He didn't show up at his plant the day after we talked to him. They tried to telephone the house but the phone was out of order. His office needed him so a foreman drove over. He couldn't raise anyone and found a window pane broken, the garage open, and the car gone. He thought someone might have entered so he told the police. The inside of the house looked all right but the police discovered that the phone wire had been cut. Later the car was located in the Newark Airport parking lot. Russo thinks it was intended to look as if Wade and his wife had gone away but he believes they were killed."

"Jason! You give me the shudders. You sound like a detective novel. People vanish and their bodies are put in quicklime, or hidden graves, or mashed in an automobile wrecking yard, or put in a coffin under a legitimate corpse, or . . ."

He gave her half a smile, without humor. "You're well read in the genre. Russo tells me the most popular method of disposal is to set their feet in concrete and drop them in the nearest river."

"Yes. Alive too. That's part of the old gang folklore. Lord. How horrible if it happens in real life."

"It does, and it is."

She looked out of the window, trying to bring the idea into personal believability and could not get a feeling of reality.

"It would take the lowest animal to do things like that."

"Man is the only animal that does. Look at the history of torture, can you imagine any animal hanging another on a cross by driving nails through its body?"

"No." The word was heavy with revulsion. "What about the other Wade? Was he murdered, too?"

"We don't know. He was in Akron playing in a golf tournament. He had a long distance phone call from Newark to his Akron hotel on the afternoon we saw his cousin and immediately afterward made a call to a Newark number. Then he checked out and there hasn't been any information about him since."

"I hope he got away. I hope they didn't find him."

"Russo thinks he's alive. He's trying to find him before the mob does."

"I hope he does. Now let's stop talking about this and get to something pleasant."

She had paid no attention when Jason had told the cab driver where to go and she had been listening too intently to notice what roads they were on. Abruptly she recognized where they were and said, "Hey, we're not headed for Westchester. Where are we going?"

After they had decided to marry, Edy Bullock had moved into an apartment in the east Seventies that made their getting together easier.

"Your place," Jason said. "I don't have time to go up there today. I thought I could bring Russo to the apartment for a drink, then we could go to dinner together."

"Oh? I think I'm getting a little tired of your pet G-man. Why should we take him to dinner? I haven't seen you alone for six weeks."

"You'll see plenty of me. I made a date with him before I knew you were coming and I can't reach him until he comes to my office at six. It would be pretty rude to break the date then."

"Oh great. So we'll have a pig between us all evening."

He smiled at her funk and told her, "I wouldn't call him that in his hearing, you might get slapped."

"We'll just see about that. I think I will."

"Well, it should be interesting." She was mistaken if she wanted to upset him with the threat to get even for his including the agent in their plans for this night.

He left her at her apartment and went back to the office and found there a note saying Mary Adams had called from the Commodore and asked him to return the call. He had Tinker get the number at once.

The voice reached his ear low, warm, and shockingly welcome, and his own tone betrayed him with its eagerness.

"What are you doing back so soon? I thought you meant to stay longer."

"It was no good," she said. "Too much pity from old friends who never even knew Forbes." She spoke the name without hesitation. "That chapter is closed, and Mr. Howe promised me a job when I wanted it."

"Fine. He isn't here right now but can you come over and we'll talk about it."

"If I won't interrupt your work . . ."

"Not at all. Not a bit."

He rang off and tried to think about business but could not concentrate. It was curious that the two girls should return to New York on the same day, possibly on the same plane, and with both of them in his mind at once he was disturbed. He felt guilty about his instinctive comparison between them and what it revealed to him. He had kissed his bride to be at the airport without sensation, and Mary Adams' voice sent a rush of blood through his head.

"What the hell," he told himself. "I've only seen her a couple of times and probably wouldn't know her if I saw her on the street."

He knew her, however, the second she came through his door, exactly the same though not so pale as the last time he had looked at her.

"You are very kind to see me right away." She came toward him with a hand extended and went on as he took it. "I didn't expect it but I'm grateful. I do need a job."

He put her into a chair and got the desk between them and sought safety in asking about her situation. Maybe it wasn't his business but Clarence Howe wanted her helped and he had better know what the imperatives were.

"May I pry, Mrs. Adams?"

"Of course, but would you call me Mary. To help me start over."

"Mary it is, if I'm Jason . . . how about insurance?"

"No. Forbes had a bad heart."

"The house?"

"I'll have to sell it. It was robbed, maybe you know. I can't possibly carry the payments on what I'll be able to earn. But I am a competent secretary; I worked at the warehouse before my marriage and know my way around there."

"You're on the payroll as of now. Would you feel comfortable there where . . . or would you rather be here in town?"

"How thoughtful. I'll take whatever is open, but I would prefer Manhattan . . . there's more for a single woman," there was slight emphasis on the words single woman, an effort not to look back, "to do over here. Shows, museums, places to occupy time after work."

The intercom made its small, decorous noise and Tinker said, "Mr. Russo is here."

Jason sat upright with a start. He had forgotten the agent was due, had forgotten his cocktail date with Edy since Mary Adams had walked in. He said, "Send him along," and as Mary Adams began to rise he waved her back to her seat. "That's the FBI agent who's working on your . . . on the case. You talked to him on the phone, stay and meet him."

Russo came through the door but stopped when he saw that Jason was not alone and his eyes asked whether he was interrupting. Jason beckoned.

"Come on in, Jay Jay. This is Mrs. Adams. She just got back from California."

Russo took off his hat and continued standing, the direct blue eyes taking in all there was to see about the woman before he spoke.

"Mrs. Adams. My pleasure." His tone was businesslike,

neutral, not sympathizing, while he waited to learn the state of her emotions.

She met his eyes and smiled, a little diffident because of the tragedy with which he was associated in her mind. Jason cut off whatever she might have said, preoccupied now with the lateness of the hour and his need to rearrange the plans for the evening with Russo.

"Edy Bullock came in today too, Jay Jay."

Russo looked toward him. "Then you won't be having dinner with me."

"Yes I will. It's all set up. Cocktails at her place in town, then dinner at Henry's . . . say, Mary, why don't you come along. Save you spending your first night in town in a hotel room."

She showed embarrassment at being included only because of the accident of her being present at this exchange, and he said urgently, "Really. It will make a better evening. It's awkward when there are two men and only one woman, and it will give Jay Jay a chance to talk to you."

She was still uncertain. "But I've never met her."

"You know her grandfather. Please come."

She looked for Russo's reaction, found his smile encouraging, and accepted without more protest. They took the elevator to the street with Jason suggesting a cab rather than trying to find parking spaces for his car.

Edy Bullock had changed to a sleek, bright pantsuit and a shining golden crown of a wig that framed her tanned triangular face. She acknowledged Mary Adams, dismissed her, and faced Russo squarely.

Jason had talked about her to Russo, given him a capsule version of her life and its problems, and Russo had expected an unhappy looking person uncomfortable with strangers. This was not at all the woman whose hand he took.

He noted the cat's eyes and thought, *this is a tigress. What in the world is a guy like Jason Dearborne going to do with a feline like this?* He liked Jason, but the President belonged on the five-fifteen going home to White Plains or Darien with a wife who cooked his meals and tended her garden and would later be a conforming member of the PTA. Try as he would he could not visualize this hostess

in that role. This one, even with the Columbia aberration behind her, would fit more snugly into café society.

He was too old a hand at investigations to make hard snap judgments and he would reserve making one here for further proof. One other thing was certain, though. In the way she cocked her hands on her hips and slowly looked him up and down he knew she was out to get his goat.

"So this is Jason's pet pig," she said. "He talks about you a lot, Mr. Russo. I hope you're all he says you are."

He damned well would not give her the satisfaction of seeing his annoyance. His blue eyes were steady, bolder than hers, and his voice was harder than Jason had yet heard it.

"Thanks, goldilocks."

"Edy," Jason tried to warn Russo and dampen the girl's attack at the same time. "You could push your hippies and the country club boys around but now you're talking to a tough guinea cop."

Neither of the two looked aside. Mary Adams watched in amazement. They were like a pair of boxers squared off for battle, alone in the room. Unexpectedly Edy laughed.

"It used to get the police on campus when we called them pigs. I just wanted to see if an elite force like the FBI could be rattled as easily."

Russo said, "While you're deciding, I'm thirsty."

She still watched him, then began slowly backing toward the bar in the far corner. Russo's eyes followed her with smoldering attention. Jason said something to him that he did not seem to hear. Russo stalked past the girl to the bar and poured a drink and swallowed it. With his back turned to Edy Bullock he said without looking around, "What will it be, Sis?"

Edy drew a short breath of protest, squeezed back the words, and said, "Scotch," and went to lean against the bar.

"Please."

"For God's sake. Do I have to beg for my own liquor?"

"To me you say please."

Without making her drink he turned to look at her. They were isolated there in an electric cocoon, a short,

tense tableau before she surrendered, made a slight curtsy and said, "Please."

Still near the door beside Jason, Mary Adams spoke in a low voice. "Have they both gone crazy?"

"No," his words were slow. "It looks like a mating dance."

"But . . . I thought she was engaged to you."

"So did I. Shall we go?"

He opened the door quietly. For an instant she hesitated, then she slipped past him. He closed the door softly, took her arm, and went toward the elevator.

They walked two blocks before they found a cab and neither said a word. Jason broke the silence when he gave the driver the restaurant address. When they were settled on the seat Mary said, "I shouldn't have been there. If I hadn't gone . . ."

"You had nothing to do with it," he told her. "Neither did I. You'd have to know Edy to understand what happened." He talked about the first time he had met her. "She's like quicksilver. Just when you think you have your finger on her she isn't there."

"But you are in love with her. You were going to marry. I think I don't like Mr. Russo very well, to walk in and take over like that."

"She started it. Couldn't you feel the sparks when they first looked at each other?"

Her face was pinched with puzzlement. "What a strange reaction from you. A friend appropriates your girl, and you walk out and leave her to him."

The strangeness to him was that his sensation was of intense relief. He saw now that he had been looking forward to the evening with reluctance instead of pleasure.

"Maybe," he said, "I jumped at the chance."

"Say that again?"

"Well, perhaps it isn't gentlemanly for a man to admit he's glad when a woman turns him down, but that's the way I feel."

"Then why did you ask her to marry you in the first place?"

"She asked me," he said, and a breaking smile told him

how stiff his face had been. The suddenness of the thing was still on him. "And I thought it was the logical thing to do."

"Logical? Oh my. Marriage is difficult enough when it's entered for love."

He worked his shoulders and felt his body relaxing to a degree he had forgotten it could. He did not answer her because the cab was stopping before the restaurant. At the table he ordered her a bourbon and water, a double martini on the rocks for himself. It passed through his mind to wonder what Edy and Russo were doing by now, then he shook it out of his head as none of his business. The drinks came and he emptied his in two swallows and held up the glass for a refill. He felt that he needed some bolstering of his ego in spite of his relief. He wondered how Clarence Howe would take the news that his granddaughter was not going to marry Jason Dearborne after all. Probably with not too much surprise, knowing Edy's proneness to changing her mind.

"What do you want to eat?" he said. "Their rib roast is the house specialty."

She ordered scallops instead and after a little debate he joined her. The waiter brought the second round of drinks. Jason was beginning to feel the first, but what the hell, this was not an ordinary evening. He raised the glass.

"To Edy. To Jay Jay."

Mary Adams saluted the toast and since he had opened the subject again himself said with undisguised awe, "I simply can't believe that scene in Mrs. Bullock's apartment. It was like a one-act play."

"That's our Edy. On stage every minute. I'll tell you about her, so you'll see how it can be."

He did, at length, more than a whisper of caution told him he had any right to say to a stranger, but once started the gin kept him talking. Mary Adams listened with compassionate, shadowed eyes, and interrupted once.

"That poor child. That poor girl."

"Yes, she was that, and she felt sorry for herself and set out to raise hell so somebody would notice her. It got to be a habit and I guess she hasn't broken it."

She picked at her food with her head bent. "That might have been difficult for you to live with, don't you think?"

He wished suddenly that he hadn't drunk the second martini. Liquor often made him too talkative and he didn't want to talk about Edy any more. His attraction to the woman across the table had been knocked out of his consciousness by the turn of the evening, but the soft, cruel glow of the pale hair in the rose tone of the table lamp struck him a treacherous blow. He had a wild compulsion to put his hands in it, to plunge his face in it and gather it against his cheeks and mouth. His composure fled. To hold onto a semblance of reason he knotted his fingers in the napkin in his lap and tried to go on with the conversation.

"Probably."

It was all he could manage at the moment and it came out as a curt grunt. She looked up and he watched expressions cross her face, changing it the way clouds crossing the sun change the force of its warmth. A cool withdrawal veiled what had been an open acceptance of him.

"But there were all those stores behind her?"

He flushed. Not at her words but at his awareness that he had flubbed something that might have been delicately building. He was hurried, overearnest in trying to repair the mood.

"We laughed about that ourselves. Yes, the stores made the match more logical, but that wasn't my motive. I liked Edy, I thought it was time I had a wife, and until .... well ... I had not then met any woman who bowled me over ..." He closed his mouth tightly, alarmed by what he had nearly said.

Her smile returned apologetically. "That was a mean, unthinking thing I said. Certainly if the stores were what you wanted you'd be in a rage now at Russo. And Mrs. Bullock looks as if she'd be sexually attractive to any man."

"Not like you are." It was said. He damned the gin and sat without breathing, waiting for her to stand up and walk out. To pop off like that when her husband had been dead less than a month was inexcusably brutal.

She did retreat back in her chair and look at him as if she had never seen him before, and again the light left her. She spoke in a tired voice. "You needn't be gallant."

"It isn't gallantry. Mary, I mean it, though I know I shouldn't have said it tonight."

"You don't even know me. I expected better of you than that."

There was no way out except to dig himself in deeper and he said weakly, "What does that mean?"

"Many men assume that a recent widow is fair game. She's supposed to be as easy as shooting ducks in a barrel."

He wanted to yell, to shout at her. He shoved back his chair, pulled a handful of bills from his pocket and slammed them on the check. "Come on. Let's get out of here."

They were on the street with the crosstown breeze whipping cold off the river. He stopped her in the middle of the sidewalk, sounding thoroughly angry.

"I am not 'many men.' I know it's too soon to say this but now I have to. And you've just seen a precedent. The day I first saw you in Howe's office a thing happened to me that never has before. You haven't been out of my mind since. At first I thought it was sympathy for you, but that would not stay as sharp as this has. The reason I wasn't upset at Edy's was that I saw the chance to be with you alone, and I wanted that more than anything else. I know it's too early. I did not intend to say a word. But it was there and it came out. You don't know me well yet, but don't judge me out of hand, please. Give me some time to convince you. I won't press. I'll wait. But don't turn me out now."

She stood in the windy darkness listening to him and listening to voices within her that he could not hear. Her face was lifted to his higher one. Her smile came back and she put a hand under his arm.

"Can we go to your apartment? I can hardly take you to my hotel room."

eleven

JAY JAY RUSSO'S first waking consciousness was of the shooting war going on in his head. Or an earthquake. On the Richter scale it would measure about eight point five. As a hangover it was a blue ribbon prize winner.

Like many Italians raised on red wine, he had a low tolerance for hard liquor, and he had drunk far too much last night in order not to let the broad get one up on him. That had been important. He lay still, not wanting to be awake at all, but the dark tunnels of his memory insistently punished him for the night, goaded him with remorse.

What devils had possessed him? Why had he let her get to him? What the hell had triggered him? She was a tramp, recognized by comparison with other tramps he had known.

There was little softness in Jay Jay Russo, who had grown up in a hard school, fought his way up into his teens until he had left for college, carried a switchblade for self-defense, though he had not been that seriously attacked by the street gangs because his father was a cop. He had been a loner through college and the department had not been exactly a picnic for the same reasons. The majority of the agents were white, Protestant, and often of southern or mid-western extraction. There were Catholics, yes, a lot of them and many Italians, but they were looked

on with a reservation that sometimes amounted to suspicion.

With that background his present sense of guilt was all the more grating on him. He knew when a woman was on the make and Edy Bullock had been in there swinging from the first moment. One look at her had warned him she was not the wife for Jason Dearborne, and subsequent events had proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt.

He came closer to feeling a friendship for Dearborne than he had for any man in a long time. Jason could be tough enough in his business world, even probably ruthless when it was necessary, otherwise he could not have risen in so few years to the head of Conglomerated Stores. Jay Jay knew there was no nepotism involved in the advance. But on the human side, Jason was too conventionally gentle to be asked to cope with the hunting cat here in the tumbled bed.

She was still asleep, snoring ever so gently, catlike even in her purr. He turned his head to look at her. One arm, shoulder, and breast were exposed, the breast a little larger than was expected on a woman her size. Her lips smiled slightly possibly with a happy dream, or the satiation of the night.

Jay Jay Russo had known women since he was fourteen when, coming up the stairs toward the Russo top floor apartment, he had seen Lizzy . . . he did not remember her last name . . . on the landing above him. She was older than he, her bosom already fully developed, and her upper lip furred with a faint moustache. He was not thinking of sex, only playing a kid's game, grabbing up under her skirt as she bent to sweep dust into a pan. She spun and caught his arm and said in her husky voice, "All right you little prick, I'll give you something to laugh about."

She hauled him in back of the flight he had climbed, through the door and on down to the basement, zipped down his fly and pulled out the limp worm that swelled and stiffened in her hand.

Since then he had known all kinds, but never one with such a lust as Edy Bullock. She had been as berserk as one

who was just discovering carnality and meant to kill herself and him before they finished. She had been drunk of course, but that could not wholly account for the wild, violent contortions. At the end they were both exhausted, too tired to speak, too muddled to think.

He looked at his wristwatch, the only thing on his hard muscled body, and was dismayed that it was after nine o'clock. He had a lot to do, and he was in very poor condition to do anything. He groaned silently, dragged himself out of the bed, padded to the bathroom, and turned on the shower over the tub. While he waited for hot water to come up the pipe he looked at the full length mirror. His eyes were bloodshot, sunk in his head like piss holes in the snow, the usually clear whites stained yellow and laced with red veins that seemed swollen. In fact, his whole eyeballs felt swollen. "My God," he thought, "if the Bureau should see me now."

He got into the shower as hot as he could stand it and let the water drive against his neck and big shoulders to ease the knotting there. Afterward he found a razor in the medicine chest and shaved, found eyedrops also in the chest and put them into his eyes. He was beginning to feel that with luck he might survive.

Going back to the bedroom for his clothes he saw the girl sitting up, a sheet thrown like a toga around her shoulders covering her from the neck down, her golden wig like a Medusa tangle on the floor, her incongruously mousy natural hair disheveled, her face as bloated as if she had been in a fight, the eyes that watched him no healthier than his had been. Without hypocritical modesty he walked in toward his shorts and swept them off the floor.

She accused him. "You were going to sneak out without waking me."

"I'm a working man." He snapped the elastic up around his waist.

"I thought you might want to apologize."

"To whom? For what?" He picked up his socks and pulled them on.

"You are a bastard, aren't you?"

He winked at her, crossed, bent, and kissed her. "Wish I didn't have to run. You're worth another hour or two."

As he went for his pants she said to his back, "If you don't want to apologize to me, what about Jason? He looked on you as a friend."

He stepped into the trouser legs, grateful that the suit was a no-press fabric, settled the waist, zipped up the fly, and hooked the tab. Then he sat down on the bed.

"Okay, Edy, let's lay it on the line. We both know you're not the girl for Jason. You'd have driven him nuts in sixty days. What you need is someone who will fight you, take a whip to you. You want to feel important but the only way you know how is to play the bully. Are you conscious of that?"

She watched him without answering.

"I did Jason a favor. He won't appreciate it and it cost me a friend, but I'm not ashamed of doing it."

"You louse. Don't be self-righteous with me. You wanted something more than that."

"Something more, yep. I walked in here and you tried to bully me. I had to put you down and this was my way."

"You did a fair job." She sank against the headboard, pulling the sheet with her and ran a hand through her hair, combing it back fiercely as though getting ready to do battle. "Are you married?"

"Divorced. She's Protestant, I'm Catholic but I don't work hard at it."

"Children?"

"A boy, ten. He'll be eleven in a couple of months."

"What's his name?"

"Jimmy."

"After you?"

"Yes."

"Who takes care of him?"

"Big Mama. His grandmother. What's the grilling getting at?"

"I'm deciding whether I'll marry you."

He laughed at her. "Me? I'm a guinea cop."

"I know who you are."

"Can you see your grandfather taking me as a grandson-in-law?"

"It's a husband I might be looking for. You owe me, Russo. You don't think Jason would marry me now?"

"Would you want him to?"

"No."

"When did you find that out?"

"When you walked in the door last night. You blew that for me."

He was having an erection. He got up, snatched his necktie from the chair, and knotted it viciously around his throat, so hard that he gagged, then jerked into his coat.

"Forget it. To hell with you."

He went out and slammed the door and through it heard a high, satisfied shriek of laughter. Sweat trickled down his spine as he rode the elevator. He felt like a fly who had blundered into a spider's sticky web. On the other side of this coin was the question of what he would say to Jason Dearborne.

Russo had never yet backed away from a fight and while this could not be properly so classified it would be a confrontation, and a damned unpleasant one. In the cab riding downtown he looked like a thundercloud. He could think of nothing by which to justify himself. You could not go to a man and say look, sap, I had to take that wench off your back before she destroyed you. No man wants to hear that someone else thinks he can't handle his own affairs.

He went into Tinker's office with a blank mind. All he could do would be present himself and stand still for whatever Jason wanted to call him. Tinker had a smile for him, but it would probably be the last. She had been very nervous with him on his first visits here but that had eased up and now she was casually friendly.

"Mr. Dearborne's on long distance." She sounded apologetic. "I'll buzz for you as soon as he finishes."

Russo was too restless to sit down. He prowled around the anteroom like a caged tiger until he heard her announce him on the intercom and the immediate garble of Jason's voice saying to send him right in. He went unhesitatingly to the door, opened it, stepped through, closed it with a hand behind him and stopped where he was, looking at Dearborne.

There was a neutral silence while Dearborne looked back at him, then Dearborne broke it. He laughed harder than Russo had ever heard him.

Uncertain of what that meant, Russo went forward to the desk. "What's so goddamned funny?"

"You are. You look like you've been playing house with a cyclone."

Russo had expected anger, had been ready for recriminations. He was braced to receive an attack. He was not prepared to be laughed at by the man he had cuckolded. His mind scrambled to readjust, his defenses crumbling, and finally a grin lifted the corner of his crooked mouth.

"You're the damnedest. I thought you'd tear my head off."

"Why?"

"For walking off with your girl."

"Thanks."

Russo sat down. Even if he had been feeling well he would not have understood this turn clearly, and he was most certainly not well. His voice was puzzled.

"I don't get it."

That embarrassed Jason and he said hurriedly, "Why don't we just skip it, let's say the engagement was a mistake in the first place. Okay?"

"Well . . . okay. . . ."

"She's a lot of woman, Jay Jay, you'll be a matched team."

Russo put up a hand. "Oh now, hold up a minute. I just met her last night and if you think . . ."

Jason said quickly, "Never mind. It's none of my business."

Russo nodded agreement to that. It was no one's business but his, and he refrained from saying that he had no intention of being hooked into marriage with cat's eyes.

"Shall we talk about something else?"

"Fine with me. Have you people located the other Wade yet? Larry?"

"We have not." That was another subject on which Russo would not be entirely open at this time. "The airlines, the railroad, the buses, the car rental companies turned up nothing. That leaves the possibility that some-

one drove him to Cleveland or somewhere else to get a plane. I think it will be a long time before he shows."

"You don't think the mob got to him?"

"That could be. Anything is possible when you're dealing with the Syndicate."

"Then what can you do now?"

They were trying to plant a bug on Cataffo's phone, which would not be easy. The undercover boys said the Sands Point estate was tighter than a corpse's cunt in rigor mortis, but the department had some electrical wizards.

They had also traced the number Larry Wade had phoned from Akron to a location in Newark, a bar named The Tavern. It was not The Tavern's regular phone, but a separate single-party line, under the name Percival Smythe. That was pretty fancy for a Sicilian to dream up but Percival Smythe just could be Johnny Dee. They were trying to get a tap on that too but biding their time to be sure not to frighten him off if it were Dee.

He did not tell Jason either of these moves. Jason did not have the experience to know what could and could not be safely repeated. He stood up.

"We do what the army does, sit still and wait for a break. We still friends?"

Jason grinned up at him. "Still friends." He was smiling when the agent went through the door whistling.

twelve

AS DON of the family that controlled most of Manhattan, Muro Ciacioha was not as powerful as Fred Denapole who ran Brooklyn. The Brooklyn mob had more members than any other in the country. But what Ciacioha lacked in numerical strength he made up in guile.

For one thing he maintained the best intelligence of any *Cosa Nostra* leader, his informers spying not only on the local police, judges and prosecutors, but also on the area families. So it was that he heard of the meeting at Sands Point within hours of its conclusion, as soon as Cataffo's driver could safely get the word to him.

The driver had been in Ciacioha's pay ever since Muro had been made a Don and built up his network of surveillance on his brother leaders, including Cataffo even though he was retired. As time passed Muro had debated cutting the driver off because Cataffo was staying completely out of things and therefore was not worth the expense of keeping track of. But the report of the meeting, in much detail because Cataffo had been unable to keep from boasting to his old and trusted follower, proved that the investment had been well made.

Ciacioha and his *consiglière* congratulated themselves and then huddled down to discuss what it meant. The glar-

ing fact that the Manhattan Don had been excluded was enough to make the most foolhardy man rethink his position, and Muro had never been noted as incautious.

The reason for his exclusion, along with Pugaliese, was not hard to find. Muro Ciacioha controlled the private garbage collection company that serviced many of the big Manhattan restaurants. The company perforce must have a place to dump the refuse and Julio Pugaliese had such a place in Jersey. They had long ago arranged an alliance whereby Ciacioha used the Pugaliese dump to their mutual profit. It was understandable therefore that in planning to discipline Pugaliese the Dons should be suspicious of Ciacioha.

Muro did not blame them. He was an eternally suspicious man himself, his antennae forever feeling about through the winds of change for possible threats against him. His concern was over exactly what steps he should take. He could not break his connection with the Bag Man until he could find another place to dump, and that would be hard. New York was running out of places to put its enormous and growing waste material.

But his particular worry was that Frank Cataffo had been made *Capo di tutti capi* and not even Denapole would have dared do such a thing without the concurrence of all the other families from coast to coast. That such a large agreement could have been arrived at without any of his spies turning up a whisper of it was very disturbing. It meant that not only the four Dons who had called on Cataffo, but all of the other leaders, had marked him as a friend of Pugaliese and not to be trusted. Men had died in like situations.

Ciacioha was angry with Pugaliese anyway and it would serve the son of a bitch right if the *commissione* and the new *Capo di tutti capi* sentenced him to death. No man had the right to refuse to appear before the *commissione* or refuse to give up a person to them even if that person was his son.

Maybe, the *consiglière* suggested, because they had done business together for so long, Ciacioha could talk some sense into Pugaliese's thick head.

"I dunno," Muro said without too much conviction. "I can try. Could be with the new set-up he'll listen. . . . Go ahead and make a meet for us."

A date was arranged for the first of the following week. Jerry Konner said it could not be sooner. Whether Pugaliese was being arrogant again or whether, as Konner told them, his Don was involved with a troublesome problem Ciacioha could not figure. The delay irked him but there was no immediate rush. It would take Denapole some time to gather a retinue of soldiers to guard Frank Cataffo, acquaint them with the Sands Point area and align them into an effective force. The new *Capo di tutti capi* would not move against Pugaliese until the conspiring Dons were satisfied of the security of their mediator.

Julio Pugaliese really was involved. Both of his sons had put the family in jeopardy. It wasn't enough that Tough Tony had brought the wrath of the *commissione* down on their heads, but Little Julio's soap deal had to be straightened out. The Don could not afford to let the Conglomerated Store people think they could keep him out of their market, and out of his moves to correct that idea new trouble had risen.

Johnny Dee, properly humbled, had sent a request thorugh channels for another emergency meeting and they were gathered in the office at Pugaliese's motel. Pugaliese was in a savage rage because Johnny had just told him the Big C had canceled their orders for olive oil. Worse, Johnny had waited three days to break that news while he tried to line up a string of rival markets as a substitute. If that had worked he would simply have told Pugaliese that the new connection would be better than the old, but although he had one of their clerks in his pocket he could not make a deal with their purchasing department. He stood quaking while the storm broke over him, belatedly seeing what he had risked.

Jerry (the Ice Pick) Konner was already on the phone ordering that The Tavern be closed immediately, gone over with a fine-tooth comb, its books taken out and its personnel questioned, then moved to a different communi-

ty where they could not be reached, the Percival Smythe phone line yanked out clean.

"What you got, a head filled with nothing but shit?" Pugaliese yelled at Johnny. "Three days you don't tell us this? What you think that Fed fink Russo is doing? You think he's only looking at Forbes Adams and soap powder? Big C cancels our oil, don't that tell you the Feds want to pressure you into blowing your cover? Three days already. And before that your jerk Larry Wade phones you from Akron, from a hotel maybe. If he did, they got your number on record. You said before that Frank Wade told Russo about Akron. You think the Feds are stupid? Lazy? How many bugs you think they've got on that Smythe phone? How long they had them? What they been listening to? For three days. Who you talked to in those three days?"

Johnny Dee sent a guilty, sidelong look toward Little Julio and saw the lawyer's face redden, saw him come out of the chair in a rush, snarling at him.

"Me for one. I'll kill you, you lard-assed idiot."

Big Julio stepped between them. "Stop it. Stop it. We go to hell in pieces and you act like a clown. Get your mind on what you said over that phone. What was it?"

The lawyer straightened and thought back, then shook his head. "Nothing to hurt. I called him to say I was sending over a guy who needed a loan. That's all. No names."

Pugaliese nailed Johnny Dee with his glare again. "Who else? Remember. Remember good."

Johnny Dee tried frantically to recall every conversation through those three days, mopping at his white face and finally said in relief, "No names. Nobody with names. Except a clerk I was trying to sell oil to, but no pressure there. He'd like to work it, for a kickback, but he couldn't swing it."

"We'll see," Pugaliese said. At least he had stopped yelling. "Jerry, have the kitchen send in some food. We'll wait for the report on The Tavern."

For once in his gluttonous life Johnny Dee had no appetite. He ate anyhow in nervous compulsion. They had all finished and the dishes had been cleared before the call

came. The voice told them there was one bug on the regular Tavern phone line, which had been there all along though they did not know whose it was, and had been left alone as harmless. There were no other electronic devices on the premises. The Tavern was in the process of being cleaned out.

The men, except for Johnny Dee, began to relax, but Johnny sweated and worried over what would be done to him because of his dangerous mistake. Julio returned to the subject of business. There was nothing to be done about the soap for the time being, with the Wades out of production, but the other matter must be resolved.

"Jerry," he said, "what do we do about the oil?"

Jerry Konner said, "See that Big C gets the message. Send some soldiers to some of the stores. They ask for our oil, when the clerks say they don't have it, wreck what oil is on the shelves, and some other stuff." He caught Pugaliese's eye and asked a question by barely tipping his head toward Johnny Dee. Pugaliese nodded slightly and Konner continued. "Johnny, you handle it. See that they all hit at the same time. Make it noon, not too many shoppers then, not many clerks on the counters. Wait a couple of weeks to be sure the Feds aren't watching Big C stores."

"Sure," Johnny said. He wondered at being trusted with the mission. It was possible that his long record of loyalty and effectiveness was helping him, getting him the chance to make up for the recent spate of mistakes. Or it was possible some accident might befall him if in eagerness to prove himself he should supervise the raids too closely. For instance, if he entered a store a "clerk" might just happen to shoot him. He decided he would not be that eager. He need not be, for the tactic was familiar, the same they used to line up the reluctant little Italian stores.

"We'll set you up in a new stand," Konner told him. "Let you know where when we got it."

Johnny Dee went away still worried.

Julio Pugaliese watched him leave and thought that something would have to be done about the fat man soon, but it could not be done immediately. The D & D sales company was paying off well and he did not want to interrupt it, hand it over to someone else until he found a man

equal to the job. Meanwhile, it would take the rest of the week to establish a new station for Johnny, get a phone in, and alert the family to the change of address.

Muro Ciacioha's request for an interview came in the middle of this upheaval, while Pugaliese was still edgy over the squeak past the FBI. He figured sourly that the Manhattan Don probably wanted him to cut his dumping fee and told Konner that he would not cut one cent, he might even double the price to hear the little Dago scream.

"I'll see him Tuesday," he said. "Tell him at my house. I want to be sure of him."

On Tuesday morning Muro Ciacioha drove himself, alone in the car, to the Pugaliese house. He parked in the paved area inside the gate, got out, and stood patiently for the guard's search of his person. Then walked across the flagstone path through the exposed, open lawn to the porch and was admitted, escorted to Julio's big garden room.

Pugaliese was not a large man but he dwarfed the garbage man who crossed toward him like a bantam cock, his two-hundred-dollar shoes as light on the carpeting as if he walked on a cushion of air. The Dons embraced and kissed in the old fashion, a custom intended to assure that neither considered himself better than the other. Pugaliese was always impressed by the sartorial elegance affected by Ciacioha in compensation for his slight stature, and he held him at arms length to offer his standard greeting.

"Hey. Fancy. You wear the clothes nicer than anybody. What's the word?"

Muro noted both Jerry Konner and Little Julio in the room. He did not mind Konner's presence but the lawyer was an uncertain quantity in what was to be at best a very delicate council. He smiled at the compliment and said, "Best I tell just you first, then you decide who should hear."

"In the garden," Pugaliese agreed.

Jerry Konner went to open the French door and issue them through. They would be in plain sight all the while and Ciacioha was unarmed. He watched them follow the aisle of statuary and sit on a marble bench and stood where he was while they talked.

Ciacioha remarked on the beauty of the grounds, and then said in a conversational tone, "Old Frank Cataffo had a birthday party last week."

"So? How old now?"

"Eighty years."

Julio Pugaliese sniffed at the information, puzzled, not knowing if this was small talk preliminary to what Muro wanted to say, or if not, what was so important about such a party that Ciacioha would make a trip to Jersey to tell Pugaliese.

"A large party, was it?"

"Just four. Denapole, Antonucci, Fabizzi, Visconti."

Pugaliese sat quite still. "Not you?"

"No."

It was not a party. It was a meet. "How do you know?"

"I heard. They give him a present. A crown."

"An expensive crown?"

"Capo di tutti capi."

Julio Pugaliese smiled at the joke then shook his head in disapproval. "Very bad taste. They should not mock a toothless old man."

"Not so," said Muro. "They mean it."

"Can't be. Nobody can be boss of everything."

"Frank Cataffo is now."

Pugaliese spat a stream across the walk in irritation with such foolishness. "Luciano made the rule."

"Charley's dead, Julio."

"No matter, who could change the rule?"

"Denapole did."

Pugaliese thrust up his cocked arm with the middle finger of his hand extended stiffly. "Shove Denapole."

The New Jersey Don was being his usual obdurate self but Muro Ciacioha kept trying to make him accept this new fact of life.

"Shove Denapole my ass. You think I drove clear the hell over here for games? This is me, Muro, your friend, we have things together. I tell you Denapole did it and he couldn't have without the rest behind him. Wise up."

Ciacioha was like a scared chicken, Pugaliese thought, falling for somebody's harebrained gossip, and he sighed impatiently at the little man.

"Make sense, Muro, why would the families listen to that one?"

Jerry Konner saw Ciacioha bounce up, plant himself in front of Pugaliese, clamp his hands against his hips and lean forward, bending his face too close to Julio. Konner shoved his hand into his pocket. He could almost distinguish the Dago's angry words, but not quite.

Ciacioha was shouting. "Because they're going to lean on you. The *commissione* told you to come to the table with them and you said screw them. They don't take that."

The loud voice alone infected Pugaliese with anger and it was bright in his dark eyes, ugly on his heavy lips. "Screw you, too, fancy pants. California don't own the world. They can't hog it all out there, they got to share. Go tell the *commissione* that if you're so shitzy about Denapole. Tell them to make room for me, then I'll come talk."

Muro Ciacioha was washed with sudden fear. There was Konner at the door with a gun in his hand, and Pugaliese was a victim of mercurial, maniacal rages, and there were the headstonelike marbles marching in awful readiness down their double rank. He was absolutely alone in this stronghold, without help, dead if Pugaliese so much as lifted a finger toward the French doors. His only escape lay in convincing the bullheaded Don before him that his course was toward helping an ally. He stepped aside and sat down on the cold slab again, well away from Pugaliese, twisting to face him and be able to see Konner too, and held up his open hands, imploring.

"My friend. My friend Julio. I told you about Cataffo so you'd be warned what they're trying. I don't say you're not right. What you do I'll back you all the way. You want to hit Cataffo, I help. But do it quick before he gets an army."

The speech cooled Pugaliese and he was pleased to see the little man's fear of him. He was pleased, too, by the offer of assistance in taking down the old Don, but he would not go that way. He stood up, unhurried, and said as Ciacioha followed him to his feet.

"No. If he's really *Capo di tutti capi,* it's okay. Maybe best. They want to knuckle under but they got to save

face. They get a middleman to talk through and I tell him let me in California. I show him how there's room for everybody. We make a deal. Then there ain't no war."

He spread his thick arms around the smaller man and crushed him tighter than was necessary in a vindictive amusement, and they walked together back to the house and past a relaxing Jerry Konner. But Ciacioha did not feel easy until he had driven out through the gate and out of the neighborhood.

He watched his rearview mirror as he crossed the George Washington Bridge, saw that he was not being tailed, and gave his attention to what his next move should be.

His garbage trucks would continue to use the Pugaliese dump, but Ciacioha knew that he would have to make himself right with the other families somehow. A mad dog like Pugaliese might think he could defy the *commissione*, win the concession he wanted from them, but Ciacioha knew that would not be done. He was not blind like Pugaliese. The other Dons would have to bring Pugaliese to heel, or anybody else in the country could get big ideas and make more trouble. If Pugaliese would not heel he would have to be got rid of.

Ciacioha's only question was to whom he should make his peace overtures. His first impulse was Fred Denapole, the strongest Don, but he and Denapole had had some disagreement as to who should control the piers on the Manhattan side and he might have trouble getting to see him or making him believe the sincerity of his defection from Pugaliese.

Then he saw it, as plain as his long, hooked nose. Cataffo was the answer. He had never met the new Boss, the old man had been in eclipse before Ciacioha became a Don, but he thought he had an advantage in that, because of the age difference, Cataffo could not associate him with the attempt on his life. He even had an easy entree through Cataffo's driver, who could arrange a meeting. He never phoned the man, but once a week the driver called him from a pay phone in Port Washington. Wednesdays. Tomorrow was Wednesday.

When the call came Muro said, "I want you to fix it so I can see Cataffo."

The driver's voice ran up the scale in fright, perhaps because if his two Dons got together his dual role might be discovered by the new Boss. Muro understood and hurried to reassure him.

"Tell Frank I have much respect for him and that I can show him how to bring Pugaliese to justice. I want to help Our Thing."

He rang off before the driver could argue, and knew the man would deliver the message. If Muro did not hear from Cataffo, the driver's life would not be worth much. But it was two days before the response came inviting Muro to Sands Point.

While Muro was receiving his invitation Jay Jay Russo was homeward bound, tired, empty handed, and as professionally discouraged as he ever allowed himself to be. Two weeks had passed now since Dearborne had mailed the olive oil cancellation to the D & D Sales Agency and there had not been a single reaction from Johnny Dee. The attempt to flush the mobsters had not worked. The *Cosa Nostra* must be laughing up its sleeve at the FBI. The only sign that they were alive and working had come when Russo had run down the blind phone at The Tavern and sent a fresh, unknown agent there to go in for a quiet drink and see if Johnny Dee was in the place or his car in the parking lot. He was there all right, but some days were lost while they moved cautiously toward putting a tag on the Smythe phone. Before they succeeded the bar was abruptly closed, emptied, and locked up, the suspect phone gone, with only a hole in the wall where the wire had come through. Vague rumors persisted of some impending upheaval in the underworld but no action had yet surfaced there.

Russo entered his apartment expecting to hear the omnipresent television, but instead caught low, live voices, one his son's, the other a woman, not his mother's accented. words. He started into the living room and froze in the open doorway.

Beatrice Russo sat beside a window knitting, her full mouth a straight, tight line. Sprawled on the floor Jimmy lay spread legged poring over a jigsaw puzzle. Beside him, also full length, with one leg bent up at the knee, Edy Bullock fitted a piece into place and crowed in triumph. She wore a slack suit and looked more like a boy than a woman. She either heard or sensed Russo's arrival and scrambled to her feet, laughing.

"Hi, Jay Jay."

His face, as stiff as a mask, was hard to speak through. He said, "What are you doing here?"

"Getting acquainted with your family." She rumpled Jimmy's hair as he jumped up.

The boy was grinning, his eyes shining and he blurted over Edy's words, "Hey, Dad, she's got horses up in the country and she's going to teach me to ride them."

Russo heard him in a detached way and said to Edy, "Get your purse and hat if you've got one. I'll take you home."

"But I don't want to leave yet." "Ah, gee." The woman and the boy spoke together.

Russo picked up the purse from the table, put a hand under Edy's arm. "Jimmy, say good-bye to Mrs. Bullock. Big Mama, I won't be here for supper."

Holding her arm tightly, he steered the girl out of the apartment and down the stairs. On the empty landing one flight up from the street floor he stopped her, turned and put one foot on the second step up, yanked her across his raised knee and spanked the taut rump vigorously. Edy Bullock yelped and fought. When he hauled her upright again she swung a vicious slap across his face. He slapped her back, forehand and then backhand, jarring her head from side to side. When she opened her mouth to yell he took her by the shoulders and shook her until her teeth rattled, then held her still. Her wig was awry, down over one eye. Gasping, panting, furious, she snatched it off and threw it in his face. Russo caught it and slapped her with it and said through his clamped jaws, "I've seen some spoiled brats, but you take the prize."

She sucked in enough breath to speak with and bit out,

"I've met some rats in my time but never one to equal you."

"Good thing to know. Teach you to leave my family alone."

"You . . ." Again she fought to break free but he held her arm in a grip that hurt. "I'll do that all right. You don't think I'd marry a brute, do you?"

He turned her down the last flight without letting go of her and she went with jerky, angry steps one tread behind him so that her head was more nearly level with his. Russo, trained to compose himself, put his anger down but another eruption rose to plague him in a swift, stabbing urge to have her, violently, as on that first night. That was harder to root out than temper.

When he reached the bottom level she leaned back, refusing to take the last step so that he either had to pull her on or stop. He stopped and looked at her and their eyes held, a sexual heat in hers too. Her throat constricted and she swallowed, then she said quietly, "All right, Russo, I shouldn't have gone up there without being asked. It was bratty. Forgive me. But I do like your son. Couldn't I . . . teach him to ride?"

"It wouldn't work," he said. "Marriage."

"Why not?"

"Our backgrounds are too different. Rich girl and a wop cop."

"Let's explore that. Jay Jay, come on over to my apartment where we can have a drink and talk."

They were showered and dressed again and on their second drink when the phone rang. Edy answered it and said with a grin, "Why, hello there. Yes, he's here."

She passed the phone to Russo, who wondered how the caller had tracked him down, until Jason Dearborne said, "Thank God I've found you. I've been trying to reach you for hours."

"I just got back from Washington, late afternoon."

"Oh. I finally called your home and Jimmy said you'd gone out with Edy, so I took a chance on catching you there. Have you seen the evening papers?"

"No."

"At noon today five of our stores were invaded. That's a slack period and nobody paid attention to the men until they started smashing bottles of olive oil. The clerks tried to stop them and some were hurt. Our Peekskill manager ran out of his office with a revolver and they killed him. They all got away before the police came. Then at three o'clock this afternoon I had a phone call, a voice saying this was only a warning, that unless we carried the right kind of oil, the Big C would be put out of business."

Russo had sat upright, his hand tightening on the instrument. "They all got away? Weren't any of the stores ones we've got stakeouts on?"

"Not one."

"Damn."

"Yes. And Jay Jay, Howie says we tell them to go to hell. He wants to fight it through."

"That takes guts," Russo said. "We'll keep trying to make a breakthrough."

thirteen

THE LONG BLACK car picked up Muro Ciacioha two blocks away from his apartment building. He had stood on the corner while it circled the block twice to make sure Ciacioha did not have a few friends ready to follow along.

Cataffo's driver was behind the wheel and Ciacioha barely glanced at him, then looked at the two men in the rear seat. One of them he recognized as belonging to the Brooklyn family, although he did not know the man's name. The other was a stranger. The Brooklyn man climbed out, motioned Ciacioha in, and climbed back, putting Ciacioha in the middle where the stranger made a rapid, expert frisk, then sat back satisfied that Muro had no weapons. The car swept up Roosevelt Drive, across Queensborough Bridge, and out Northern Boulevard.

As it pulled toward the high gates the driver blinked his lights, the gates swung open and the car slid on up the long drive to the big house.

Muro Ciacioha felt his tension increase. Within minutes he would be facing the Boss of Bosses, and whether he came out of this fortified installation with a whole skin would depend on his convincing Frank Cataffo of which side he, Muro, was on.

When he walked, under guard, into the *Capo di tutti*

capi's huge receiving hall he saw that his host was not alone. Frederico Denapole was with him. The Brooklyn leader did not smile, offered no greeting, turned his back, and went to take a chair near where Cataffo sat enthroned in an enormous and magnificent high-backed antique walnut seat.

Ciacioha broke stride. He hid a quick rising anger. He did not like Denapole being here. It was bad enough to admit to Cataffo that he was willing to betray his business partner for the good of the organization, but worse to have to say it with a partial enemy as witness. Denapole might not believe his arguments.

Then he went forward for the ceremonial kiss, but Cataffo did not stand up. Ciacioha supposed that he should not have expected it. The first approved Boss of Bosses would have to make some show of distinction between himself and the lower Dons. The little man made a hasty deferential bow.

When Cataffo spoke the voice was somewhat reedy with age but he sat so regally upright that Ciacioha was impressed in spite of himself. The Boss said straightaway, "How did you know that I am now *Capo di tutti capi?*"

Ciacioha took a wily chance. "My cousin from Detroit told me."

Cataffo exchanged a glance with Denapole and Ciacioha saw with relief that they accepted the lie. It told him his judgment was right, that the other families were in on the elevation of Frank Cataffo.

The old man omitted all preliminary courtesies. "Why did you ask to see me?"

Ciacioha said carefully, "I sent you word why. To help about Pugaliese."

Cataffo's brushy brows drew together and he turned to Denapole for the meaning of that statement, having been too long out of touch to know the nuances of present relationships. Denapole also frowned.

"You're known as a friend of Pugaliese."

Ciacioha offered his open hands as though he bared his soul and put anger in his voice. "I am no friend to anyone

who breaks the rules of Our Thing. He should have come to the table like he was told."

Denapole persisted. "But you're in business with him. You willing to spoil that?"

"I pay him one dollar a load to dump my garbage and junk in his dump. That does not make me his friend. I saw him just the other day to argue he should not be stubborn. I got a kick in the ass for thanks. I say he's got to be hit."

Denapole cocked an eyebrow at Cataffo and again Ciacioha knew he had scored. They were believing him. Then Denapole sneered at him and said caustically, "And I suppose you know just how to do it."

"Easy." Ciacioha went carefully now, explaining the obvious so that these duller-witted men could not possibly misunderstand. "He knows about Cataffo being elected and his army's ready for you. Also the damn fool has the Task Force on his tail for hitting a couple civilians and setting the wrecking crews on some Big C stores, so he's extra watchful. He stays forted up in his house or goes with a car full of guards in front and behind to his motel."

Ciacioha pushed out his little chest and poked at it with a forefinger. "I'm the only one outside his family that can get to him now. I call up and tell Konner I got new contracts with a hotel chain, I need more space, need to use the incinerator more, I'll pay extra. The Bag Man is greedy as a whore. He'll buy. He'll want a meet. I tell him I can't meet at the house or motel on account of the FBI blowing down his neck. Make the meet at his dump. He's got a soldier at the dump too but my trucks go in and out all the time."

He stopped, waiting while he watched the idea take shape in Denapole's mind, then he spelled the rest out in detail to make sure.

"I give you a clean truck, you put men inside, five or six, behind a bunch of cardboard boxes like trash. My driver takes it in and up close to where we're talking, Pugaliese and me. Shoot through the boxes . . . we use the kind with holes in them . . . Pugaliese never knows what

hits him. Then you get his guard and we put them all in the incinerator and build up the fire. There goes Pugaliese, up in smoke, and the families are out of trouble."

Grudgingly Denapole admired the idea. It had a nice humor about it, Pugaliese frying in an incinerator before he should fry in hell, the *commissione's* first real problem in years literally gone up in smoke. He nodded approval to Cataffo, then looked back at Ciacioha.

"When can you set it up?"

The little man had thought this through too. "Like I say, I seen him the other day. If I come at him too fast he might smell something. Better wait a few days."

It was agreed that they would wait a week, and Ciacioha departed with his skin intact, very satisfied with his performance. After the black car had taken him back down the drive and through the gates Denapole walked with Cataffo out to the porch for his own leave taking.

"Little ratfink," Denapole swore, "If it was anybody but Pugaliese I'd throw the punk out. I don't like that weasel."

"Use what weapons we have," Cataffo said mildly. "He's right the Bag Man would be hard to reach these days any other way."

Julio (the Bag Man) Pugaliese would be very hard to reach. He was forted up and feeling pressure. Ever since he had set about establishing his sons in flanking positions to enhance the family fortune, things had been going amiss. Tough Tony had been crude and undiplomatic in California, and having run for home he was a hot potato in their midst. He should have gone to the table when he was first called, and paid a fine and then asked for territory. Pugaliese could not give up his son without great loss of face, and now the situation had gone too far, with all the families united against him under old Frank Cataffo. He would have to make a compromise, he could not fight them all. Perhaps he could work it through the little cock Ciacioha as he had suggested in the garden, get him to offer terms of agreement. But first he had to repair his image, prove his strength by shoving the rod up such an economic giant as Big C Stores, so that he wouldn't have to go to the *commissione* with his hat in his hand. And he

could pressure Ciacioha into speaking for him by a threat to raise his dumping charges.

Yet that was complicated by the foul-up of Little Julio's proposal to enlarge their Big C oil beachhead with soap powder, with the FBI acting like hired Pinkertons for the stores.

He was blowing off pent-up steam to both sons, with Jerry Konner listening in thoughtfully. He ought, he said, to chase Tony's broads out of town and throw both him and Little Julio on a boat for Italy where they could not mess anything else up while he untangled what they had already done.

"The one of you's got Federal heat cramping me and the other's got all our friends on my neck so I can't move. Why the hell can't you use some brains?"

Tony said sullenly, "Some friends." He did not want to go to Italy, into exile with a bunch of stinking Moustache Petes. "Why get your bowels in an uproar about us? What about Johnny Dee? What about him?" He jerked his head toward Konner's table. "What about you? Sending the crews out to slap around a few bottles of oil like slapping at an elephant with a fly swatter . . ."

Little Julio the lawyer added his protest. "And they killed a civilian they didn't have to, which will only make the management madder."

"Fuck the civilian," Tony sulked. "What does old man Howe care about one manager? He's got a couple thousand." Glaring at his father he said, "Why don't you do something useful?"

"Such as?" Julio sounded as if he doubted that this son could come up with any useful idea on his own. Tony surprised him.

"Such as that Jersey City warehouse. The stuff in there must be worth a million anyway. Let me take the Firebug and some soldiers and burn the stinking place. Hurt the bastard where he lives, in his moneybags, and he'll get the message."

Jerry Konner interrupted with a short laugh. "And you'll get yourself caught. The *commissione*'s got a fifty grand piece on your head."

Tony swore at the Ice Pick. He didn't see why they had

to keep a rabbi around anyway when they had Little Julio with his law degree.

"Get caught how? Who's going to take a crack at me in our town? Who's gonna show in our territory?"

Jerry Konner waited for the Bag Man to tell his son that there could be a defector they had not found out, lying in wait and itching to collect the *commissione's* bribe, but Pugaliese was beginning to nod agreement to the project.

"We'll make a team, six that we're sure of, people from the place here. The only outsider will be the Firebug and he won't try to hit you with the others there. Go ahead."

In haste to be back in his father's good graces, Tough Tony stomped to the desk and reached for the phone. The Ice Pick snatched it away and snarled, the sound of a wild animal with meat that another is trying to steal.

"Stupid schlemiel. If that's bugged there'll be cops roosting in that warehouse just waiting for you to light a match. Try counting on your fingers for a change."

Tough Tony looked hungrily at the long, thin neck that he would love to squeeze and snap, but there was that slim blade in the sheath under the back of Konner's collar and the Jew was too quick with his hands. He turned away and slammed out. When he was gone Konner turned his smoking eyes on Pugaliese.

"That kid is going to get us all killed yet."

The Don gave a helpless grunt. Like most fathers, he was on one side of a generation gap and he did not know what to do about it.

Tony made his call from a service station a mile down the road operated by the family as a conversion garage for stolen cars.

That afternoon a family soldier in a nondescript jalopy cruised around the blocks that bounded the warehouse, interested in the juxtaposition of gates, loading docks, cubicles where night guards could be expected, then he traced the most direct route back to Newark. It was a Friday and the warehouse yard was busy with incoming and outgoing deliveries. It would be busy all night, through the light traffic hours, with trucks shipping food products out along the network to stores in outlying New Jersey, Westchester,

Manhattan, for Saturday sale. On Saturday night it would be dark because the outlets were closed on Sundays.

At eleven o'clock on Saturday night the same soldier drove a nine passenger station wagon carrying Tough Tony and the other five men, picked up the Firebug, and continued on to the edge of Newark where a Big C truck hijacked the previous night was stashed. All except the driver transferred to the truck, then he led the way to the warehouse, doused his lights, and parked, hidden from the wide gate by the building corner. The truck rolled on and pulled up before the gate and the man driving it put his head out of the cab, calling to the uniformed guard in the cubicle just beyond the fence.

"Open up, I got a delivery here."

The guard came out of his box shaking his head. "Nobody here to unload. Don't you know we're closed?"

"I had a breakdown on the road . . . couldn't make it any quicker. I'll unload."

Still the guard hesitated. "I got no authority . . ."

"And I got fruit . . . perishables. . . . What you want me to do, eat it?"

Reluctantly the guard turned a key in the padlock, shook the chain free, and swung the gate wide, following its arc which took him back to the door of the cubicle. The truck driver nosed the silencer of his gun into the cab window and fired, knocking the guard into the booth, out of sight as he fell in a huddle.

The truck rolled on, around the ell of the big storage shed and backed up at the loading ramp. The metal tailgate of the truck banged loudly as the driver dropped it. Tough Tony was out first and jumped toward the delivery entrance as a night watchman inside opened up to investigate the noise. The watchman grabbed for his gun and started a yell but Tony stopped all that, clubbing the man in the face with his gun butt and again on top of his head as he fell. The others were out of the truck body by then and hauled the unconscious watchman across the tailgate and dropped him inside the truck. Then they helped the Firebug carry his gear into the warehouse.

The Firebug was a small spider of a man, quick moving and sure fingered. A pro. Rumor had it that a group of

major insurance companies had offered him twenty-five thousand dollars a year tax free to retire, but he had turned it down. He could make more on a few jobs like this and the tax-free provision was no incentive because he had never paid a cent of income tax. For the quick, very hot fire desired now he used magnesium powder, a tool he had learned from the fire bombing during the war, and he set to work with efficient speed.

A second night watchman appeared on a landing at the second floor of the cavernous rooms. He had drawn his gun but he took the moment to shout, "What the hell you think you're . . . " He did not finish because Tony put two bullets into his head. Other footsteps clattered on the iron stairs but they were running upward. Tony swung an arm toward the sound and two soldiers ran after the man making it, jumped over the body on the landing, and climbed out of sight to the upper rooms. Tony and two soldiers stood ready for any other interruptions while the others helped the Firebug.

The Firebug paid no attention to this background. He was busy with a pail of kerosene in one hand, a bundle of twisted paper torches under his arm, dipping them one at a time into the kerosene, then into the flame of a sturdier torch held by an assistant, and tossing them against the base of the stacked crates and boxes of merchandise. As he ran from place to place the two men following dumped magnesium on the flaring papers. In a matter of seconds the whole interior of the huge lower area was an inferno.

The two soldiers came tumbling down from above. An alarm bell rang somewhere and the overhead water sprinklers began a rain, but it was no match for magnesium. The whole crew ran outside, heading for the gate in a tight group. The station wagon horn blared and at that they began to scatter. Behind them smoke was pouring from the doorway and ahead a police car came through the gate on two wheels. Tony stopped running long enough to send a burst of bullets through the car's open window. The car jerked ahead as the driver's foot jammed on the accelerator and as his hand locked on the wheel it careened off and crashed against the side of the truck and erupted in flames.

Tony laughed and ran with the others on to the station wagon. "That," he complimented the team, "is a pretty job. Now we'll see what Mr. Howe has to tell the family."

fourteen

JASON DEARBORNE was driving Mary Adams back to town from a dinner outing at the Bird and Bottle, fifteen miles above Peekskill, when the Times radio station interrupted its concert with the flash that the warehouse was burning and wracked with explosions. He was below the last bridge, on the West Side Highway and he gunned the car toward the tunnel. If a police car stopped him maybe he could get an escort.

Mary clapped her hands against her cheeks and said in a frightened voice, "Jason . . . could that be more gangster doing?"

"I'll bet on it. They've made threats that they'd put us out of business if we didn't buy from them. It sounded so absurd I even laughed, but . . . if they can burn down enough warehouses they can cripple us."

"They must be insane."

He did not answer that. Anger such as he had never felt gorged him, evaporated the little liquor he had drunk, and had the strange effect of giving him a cold clarity of mind.

Forbes Adams, the Wades, a store manager . . . plus however many had died this night. Should he capitulate to save lives? He knew that he must not. There was no answer, no security in that. There would be more demands for concessions, greater inroads into the corporation,

eventually into the management itself, and the financial structure. Conglomerated Stores would be bled into bankruptcy, with money siphoned off to the underworld as it had been in other businesses. Many firms had crumbled, gutted from the inside by leeches who did not care that they destroyed institutions which if honestly run could pay even the leeches a fair return.

They reached the warehouse area without having seen a patrol car or a motorcycle. If he had not known where it was, the terrible red sky would have guided him. All the surrounding streets were blocked and filled with fire apparatus. The closest they could park was three blocks away, and Mary Adams ran to keep pace with Jason's stride as he forgot her. He came against a rope cordon and ducked under it, heading toward an assistant fire chief talking with two commissioners. A uniformed policeman intercepted him, saying, "You can't come in here, Mister. Go on back."

Jason said, "I am president of the company that owns this warehouse."

The policeman looked as if he wanted to say, "And I'm the Chief of Police."

Jason was pulling out his wallet to show his card when McHale's voice shouted to him and the superintendent sprinted across the web of hoses, breathing hard as he came close.

"Mr. Dearborne . . . I've been trying to call you . . . I got hold of Mr. Howe and he's on his way here."

Jason could barely hear him above the uproar of shouting firemen, screaming sirens, the raging noises of the fire itself. He waited for McHale to come up and wrote Jay Jay's home number on the back of the card and handed it to the superintendent.

"Call Russo, will you, and ask him to get hold of Maxwell. I'd like both of them here if possible."

McHale went off at a lumbering run and the assistant fire chief stepped over.

"Did I hear you say you're president of Conglomerated?"

"You did."

Across his head Jason saw that the crews were not even

trying to save the main building, only trying to contain the flames, spraying down the nearby sheds and the lot filled with parked trucks. The man's eyes, smoke-reddened but alert, ranged across the scene that looked so confusing but was professionally orderly.

"Appears to be arson," he said. "Started too fast, spread too fast. She was doomed before we got the first pumper working."

"What about the watchmen?"

"How many were there?"

"I don't know, we'll ask McHale when he gets back."

The fireman looked sickened. "We found one. There was a truck backed up to the loading dock with its roof on fire. He was inside, in pretty bad shape . . . burns, smoke inhalation, a bump on his head. . . ."

"Where is he?"

"We sent him to Saint Thomas Hospital. Then there was a police car, overturned, also on fire. Two men in it. We couldn't get them out in time to . . ." He let the words hang, unwilling to talk about the burning uniforms, the blistered, roasting flesh.

Jason saw the picture without words and found nothing more to say. He remembered Mary Adams, discovered that she was not with him, and was glad of that. Then he saw her just outside the cordon, waiting out of the way. He stayed where he was, where McHale could find him, and watched in angry awe as the huge roof crumpled in and sent a volcano of sparks, smoke laced with tongues and sudden bursts of brilliant flame exploding high into the night sky.

McHale came panting back saying that he had talked to Russo, that he would be there as soon as he could, then he himself exploded, pounding one fist into the other palm in quick, hard jabs.

"Damn them damn them damn them . . . the filthy killers . . ."

Jason said against the curses, "How many watchmen were here?"

"Three inside, a guard on the gate." Two harsh, wracking sobs broke from the Irishman. "They shot the guard in his booth, blew his head apart."

The fireman looked at him sharply, not having known about that death, intent on deploying his own crew when the police found the body. Sickness curled in Jason; he had to turn his mind away from these horrors before he lost control and vomited. He said thickly, "McHale, what was your inventory?"

The man shrugged and shook his head as if that was of no importance just now. "Half . . . maybe three quarters of a million . . . I can't think yet."

Jason remembered a diner back where he had parked. He said, "Come on and have a cup of coffee with us."

Again the superintendent shook his head. "Don't want anything. Go ahead. I'll be here."

Jason understood that the man's sense of responsibility would keep him rooted until the last wall fell, even though there was nothing at all he could do, and did not argue.

"When Mr. Howe or Russo show up tell them Mrs. Adams and I will be in the diner."

He left the cordoned area, took Mary's arm, and they walked away, saying nothing. The diner was too warm, but it was a place to sit and wait. They took a booth beside a window which looked out on the crimson pall that lay in an ugly blanket low over the intervening buildings. The counter man brought mugs of coffee.

"Some fire, huh?"

"Yes," Jason said.

The man stood by the booth, hipshot. There was no one else in the place, everyone in the neighborhood was at the excitement, and he wanted to talk. "Funny how it started so fast. Sid and Tommy, couple prowl-car boys, was in here for a break, when we looked out the window and bam, there she was, hot as hell. They took off fast, believe me. It's the warehouse, ain't it?"

"Yes. You didn't go?"

"Like hell. I leave here with that thing bringing everybody on the double, the joint'd be cleaned time I got back. I went outside, though. Heard what sounded like a couple shots and then an explosion. Jesus, then a station wagon peeled off from down there and went by here like a jet. Lot of men inside. That's when I called the cops. It smells to me like it was set."

A group of four long-haired boys came in and he went to regale them. When they left he started for the booth again for further speculation, but Russo arrived with Robert Maxwell, his Task Force boss, and he veered to the urn and brought coffee. He would have stayed for the new audience but Russo waved him away and he retired to his small kitchen.

Russo kept his voice low. "Pugaliese."

"Afraid so," Jason said. "The man here saw the fire start and a car speed away."

Russo grunted at this new information. "I saw McHale and the fireman you talked to, also the police there."

Jason put an elbow on the table and lowered his forehead into his hand. "What in God's name can we do? This can't go on. So many dead."

Russo said, "No. And we've got our break. Tell them, Bob, it's your story."

Maxwell was undecided, glancing from Russo to Mary Adams and back. Russo said, "It's all right, she's part of the family." Then he grinned, not joyously but in anticipation. "Julio Pugaliese is not going to be with us much longer."

The federal attorney did not know that he approved of telling Task Force business to outsiders, but Jason Dearborne had been exposed to so much harassment at the hands of the Jersey mobsters that he had earned some information.

His voice was tuned to carry only across the booth. "You recall awhile ago hearing us talk about a meeting at old Frank Cataffo's Long Island place? At that time he'd been out of action so long we weren't keeping track of him. But we are now. We've got his lines bugged."

Jason thought of Russo's frustration at not being able to tap in on Pugaliese. "How did you manage that when you couldn't do it in New Jersey?"

Maxwell's smile was thin, tasting this success. "The Pugaliese family, being active, kept too close a watch. Cataffo didn't, and the job wasn't too complex. His property is very isolated out there, and we had a special trunk run, tied all of his extensions into it. We can listen to every call into or out of that house. We've learned a good deal al-

ready. Now we know what that meet was about. The *commissione,*" he looked toward Mary Adams, "the *Cosa Nostra's* governing body, had ordered Pugaliese to appear before them. Jay Jay can explain why later. Pugaliese wouldn't go, so to force him they appointed Cataffo their *Capo di tutti capi,* a supreme leader, to command a united thrust against the maverick. It's the start of a gang war and I think the Bag Man will be too busy defending his family to do anything more to your company."

Mary Adams said in quick ferocity, "I hope they kill him. I hope they all kill each other."

Maxwell ducked his head. "I'm with you, ma'am. And if I could be a witness at his execution I'd forget about any pension the government might pay me and die happy."

Outside the window Clarence Howe's limousine pulled to the curb, trailed by a car filled with men, with others hanging to the outside. They tumbled off and out and ran to the limousine as though they were attacking it. Jason spun up out of the booth and jumped for the door but Russo caught his coattail.

"Just reporters."

Jason relaxed, surprised at how much tension had been in him. He went out with Russo behind him and worked through the cluster around the car until he could block them away from the door, seeing Howe as a pale, fragile figure on the rear seat. He faced around at the men who were calling questions through the glass and raised his voice.

"Gentlemen, I'll answer questions for Mr. Howe."

The man just in front of him said, "Who the hell are you?"

Clarence Howe opened the window and told Jason, "It's all right. I want to talk to them. Can you just get me through to that step."

The newspapermen gave back enough to open a path to the step under the diner's door. It raised Howe's head barely level with the men on the ground, but his bearing gave him a dignity and his voice carried an indomitable force.

"I want to make a statement. And I want to see it printed just as I say it. Whatever brutality these people stoop

to, I am not going to surrender to them. Conglomerated Stores will maintain its integrity at all times and in all places. We will not submit to being terrorized."

One reporter whistled. Another said, "Sir, who are *these people?*"

"Gangsters. Murderers, trying to strong-arm our company into buying products controlled by them, in repression of free competition."

"Can you name them?"

Behind Jason, Russo said, "Stop him. Don't let him use any names."

But no one needed to warn Clarence Howe.

"I will not. We don't have enough evidence yet to take them into court, so I presume they could sue for libel. But I remind you of their crimes. You have seen the warehouse burned, with four of our employees and two policemen killed tonight. Two other employees have been murdered and five stores vandalized. Your papers have printed those stories earlier. I regret the loss of lives, but as a proud citizen of this proud country I will fight them to my last breath. They shall in no way be permitted to dishonor the name of the Big C Stores on which so many honest men, women, and children depend for reliable products. We will never be their tool."

"Flag, family," Russo whispered. "Why did he leave out God?"

Jason whispered back, "He doesn't own any churches."

The reporters had more questions, but Clarence Howe was finished. He turned between Jay Jay and Jason and went into the diner, saying as he passed them, "Keep the boys out. I'm about done in for this night."

Russo locked the door, then went to the booth where Howe had dropped beside Mary Adams to give him the encouraging news of the impending *Cosa Nostra* war.

The fire story made the morning final editions under such heads as BIG C CHARGES SABOTAGE. A copy was brought to the Pugaliese house where Little Julio saw it first. The Bag Man and Jerry Konner had already left for the motel to receive reports from the lieutenants whose ears were tuned to catch any gleanings of possible plans

being made by Cataffo's minions concerning the Jersey family.

The lawyer read thoroughly, smiling some at the mention of a libel suit even though he was red-hot mad at his brother. He carried the paper to the rear yard where Tough Tony was romping with one of the German shepherds and slapped the story into his hand.

"You sure raised hell last night."

Tony's lips moved as he followed the words. He was unaccustomed to reading anything except the sport pages. He tossed the paper to the dog and got up from his crouch.

"Why, damn him, that old fart must have rocks in his head. Can't he understand that I'll keep at him if I have to burn every warehouse and store he's got? Does he think he can push us around?"

"That's not the point. You killed two fuzz. We've got trouble enough with the families, and the Feds already scratching for a way to get at us. This will stir them up like hornets."

"Nuts. What can they prove? We didn't leave any of our bodies there. And the families, all those old greaseballs will do is talk. Cataffo was chicken twenty years ago, he still is. He'll compromise as soon as we're ready."

A hurried mid-morning council was called to the Sands Point headquarters of the greaseballs, with the Task Force monitoring the summonses and subsequent telephone conversations. Fred Denapole told the men who gathered, "Those Pugalieses haven't got the brains of a mad dog. Any dope knows better than to tackle an outfit as big as Conglomerated Stores that way. It's okay to pressure the little jerks into taking what you want to sell. It makes sense to take over a fair-sized plant, buy a bunch of stuff on credit, peddle it, and then throw the plant in bankruptcy. But expect to cut in on a national chain like Big C by firing a warehouse? That's crazy."

Frank Cataffo agreed. He did not approve of violence especially when it was worse than wasted. "The kind of craziness that brings on Federal investigations. We'll have to move fast now. It's no longer a matter of Pugaliese re-

fusing to bring his boy to the table. We all know the only reason we can operate is because people don't see much wrong with gambling or prostitution, even shylocking. That's why Maranzano ruled out dope. But these big fires, store wreckings, killing civilians and cops . . . that worked okay in Prohibition but today it gives us all a black eye. Vito . . ." he cocked a thumb at Antonucci, "Call that Ciacioha and tell him to make the hit as soon as he can."

Muro Ciacioha, too, had read the newspaper and recognized as well as Cataffo that the Pugaliese rumble had to be quieted fast. He had an auxiliary reason for not wanting to wait longer. He was having trouble with the smokes and spics in Harlem. The Panthers were putting the arm on his numbers drops and he did not have the manpower to stop it. If he got Pugaliese for Denapole, the Brooklyn leader might then help him throw the fear of God into the jigaboos.

He told Antonucci he would phone back when the arrangements were made, called the Pugaliese house and was referred to the motel and located his target there. Konner answered, listened to Ciacioha's pitch, relayed it to Julio, then said, "I don't know about today. We got a little heat."

"I read."

"That goddamned kid, he needs a nursemaid."

Ciacioha pleaded, not minding the nervousness in his voice. It made his urgency sound more genuine. "This is a sweet deal I got but it won't wait. It'll be all right to meet me at the dump, take that back road from the motor court. You won't run into trouble there. I ain't seen a cop in them parts for three years."

Konner conferred with Pugaliese again, came back on the line and said, "Three-thirty?"

That conversation did not feed into the Task Force recorder, but Ciacioha's next one did. Ciacioha called Cataffo's house and talked to Denapole.

"It's set. Meet's at three-thirty at the dump. Now listen, have your people at my garage at one-thirty, and send getaway cars on ahead . . . not too close . . . to pick them up after we hit Pugaliese. Right?"

"Check."

The connection was broken. The Task Force man listening rang Maxwell's office and replayed the conversation. Maxwell looked across the desk at Russo. Russo's mouth pursed and the satyr eyes glowed.

"Dump, he said. What kind of dump? It could be a house or any other place known to them mutually." The eyes changed to a sad reflectiveness. "I suppose it isn't ethical not to prevent a murder . . . even that one . . . maybe we should follow them from the garage . . . ?"

Maxwell was very solemn. After a moment he said, severely, "It would be too dangerous for our men. I wouldn't think of risking them being spotted and fired on."

They sat back and smiled at each other.

fifteen

JULIO PUGALIESE'S central New Jersey dump sprawled over a blighted two hundred acres, all enclosed within a high link fence. At one end was an automobile wrecking yard, a Quonset-type building surrounded by hundreds of stripped and rusting car shells waiting to be compacted. At the other end of the property was the combustible refuse area, the smoke-belching incinerator, and an encroaching cut and fill pit for otherwise indisposable junk.

A dirt county road ran at right angles to a highway along this side of the dump, and from it a dirt track took off through the gate to the incinerator and to wherever the current edge of the pit had been moved. Trucks entered the county road from the highway, detoured through the dump, exited through the same gate, and continued down the country road in one-way traffic. Traffic was usually heavy because four firms other than Ciacioha's used the dump, one of them operated by the Pugaliese family.

Ciacioha turned his car from the highway into the county road where a small road maintenance truck was parked and two men in workman's clothes were filling chuckholes. At twenty minutes after three he parked near the incinerator and sat watching the bulldozer in the pit shove dirt over the rubbish as another company's collector poured

down his load. That truck left and one of Ciacioha's came in. Shortly after it had left Pugaliese's long black car purred through the gate and parked at a distance from Ciacioha.

There were two men in the rear seat, and the driver. The driver climbed out, came to look inside Muro's car, then walked around the incinerator to be sure Ciacioha had no one in ambush there. Satisfied, he returned and opened the door of the Pugaliese car and Julio got out, then Jerry Konner.

Muro stayed in his seat waiting to be invited out. As the time closed down he was uncomfortable, getting too old to do these jobs personally, but in this case he was the only one who could have arranged it. Yet, he was very glad to see Konner. That was a dividend. The Jew bastard had always beaten him down in his deals with Pugaliese.

Pugaliese walked to the brink of the pit and looked down on the man running the bulldozer. The man glanced up, then turned back to his work. There was no one else in sight.

Pugaliese then rejoined Konner in the open area near the incinerator and beckoned Ciacioha to them. The little man from Manhattan went toward them eagerly, smiling.

Konner said, "What's your deal?"

"Big." Ciacioha had his pitch rehearsed so that it came easily. "You know the White Castle restaurants? I got them all. I'm putting on a dozen new trucks. Class. I need maybe twice the incinerator time because they got lots of cardboard boxes, stuff that burns good."

Pugaliese looked unimpressed. "You get it Wednesdays," he said. "That's all."

"Not Wednesday . . . I got to have it Friday. They get their big deliveries on Friday."

A Pugaliese truck rumbled in and Ciacioha had a moment of cold terror, but it backed to the pit, the broken concrete in its bed spilled down, and it rolled again out of the wide gate. Ciacioha barely heard Jerry Konner saying, "Too damn bad about that."

Ciacioha appealed to Pugaliese, helped by his fright to appear on the verge of crying. "Julio . . . Julio . . . We

been friends a long time. You do me a favor, I do one for you. I raise the charge myself, a dollar and a half."

He saw the avarice flick across the Bag Man's face and beyond him, through the fence, saw the special truck turn in. Behind it the maintenance truck rattled on past the gate and down the road. Back at the mouth of the dirt road the "workmen" would have left a wooden barricade and a sign, REPAIR WORK AHEAD, ROAD CLOSED UNTIL . . . and in crude hand chalking, 5 P.M. There would be no more trucks coming to interrupt them.

Ciacioha pointed. "Look, Julio, one of my new rigs now." He raised his voice. "Charley, hey Charley, bring it over here so we can see it good."

The truck bounced over the uneven ground and stopped abreast of the group, fifteen feet away. It was not of the closed design with the revolving blade by which refuse is packed inside, but an uncovered, high sided van, with boxes heaped in it almost high enough to spill. Ciacioha left Pugaliese and Konner and walked smartly toward it, calling back his praise of it across his shoulder.

Konner stiffened and growled. The boxes were whole, not cut and flattened to fill less space. Pugaliese heard and rammed his hand into his pocket. The boxes moved and a man with a machine gun popped up. Muro Ciacioha threw himself flat and scrambled under the truck, and the gun cut loose as more men appeared on either side of the first. Pugaliese's hand was still buried when the burst of firing cut him in two. Konner was caught as he drew and vainly cast his knife. Pugaliese's driver crouched down out of sight in his seat but a line of bullets tatooed across the door and killed him.

Bodini, Frederico Denapole's lieutenant in charge of the mission, the first gunner, called over the side of the truck. "Ciacioha . . . is that all of them?"

"Guard on the bulldozer. Nice shooting." Muro climbed out, stood up, dusted at his clothes, his head bent.

Bodini fired into the head and shoulders.

In the pit the snarl and clatter of the machine working there continued, making too much noise for the man on it to hear the shooting above.

Bodini said, "Get that ape on the bulldozer."

The tailgate of the van dropped and five men jumped to the ground. One went to the front and shot Ciacioha's driver, two went to the edge of the pit. The man below caught the movement, looked up and saw the guns, tried to bring the big blade up as a shield, but it took too long. He was knocked forward out of his seat and one link tread ran over him. The unguided bulldozer lumbered on across the cut, tried to climb the steep bank, almost made it, then toppled on its side and struggled like a wounded animal as its belts went on spinning.

Bodini did not go over to look. He bent and went through Ciacioha's pockets, found a large fold of bills, said "Ratfink," and moved on to the other bodies. He found more money on both Pugaliese and Konner. He saw Pugaliese's big diamond and Konner's fine ruby but did not take either of them off the fingers, which he thought was a waste—but those were his orders.

His crew put those bodies and the chauffeur into the incinerator, and then the boxes. They ran the passenger cars and Ciacioha's truck over the edge into the pit while they waited for the getaway cars. Black smoke rolled out of the incinerator stack, heavy with the stench of burning fabric and meat. They were glad, when the cars arrived, to leave the place and head back across Jersey and the bridge toward the New York skyscrapers.

Around midnight a car swept past the locked gate of the Pugaliese estate and a package was hurled over it. The guard in the little weather shelter just inside heard the thump, saw the package bounce, and ran a safe distance off. You never knew when some joker might throw a smart-ass bomb.

When it had not exploded an hour later he fired at it, the silencer muting the noise. It still did not go off so he approached it, listening for any ticking but hearing nothing. He picked it up, risked shaking it, but nothing rattled, there was nothing loose inside. He went back to the shelter and phoned the house.

Tough Tony answered in a bored voice. He had played gin rummy with his brother for hours. Neither knew where

their father was but that was not uncommon, he did not always take them into his confidence and he often spent a night at the motel where he kept a few girls on call.

Little Julio heard Tony say, "What? Yeah, okay, bring it up here." He cocked one eyebrow and Tony said on his way back to the card table, "Some jerk tossed a package into the yard. Angie's bringing it."

"Huh-uh," Julio said and stood up. "It could be a bomb."

"He says no."

"Let him open it out there anyway."

They met the guard on the porch, told him to take it further off, soak it with the hose, and then open it where it wouldn't do any damage. Except to him, Angie thought, but he obeyed. He cut the wet cord, unwrapped the wet paper, then jumped back, yelling.

Both sons went toward him, Tony taking out his gun. Maybe it was a snake or something like that.

What they looked down on, lying illumined by the spotlight on the corner of the roof, were two white severed hands, one wearing a diamond, one a ruby ring. It could be argued that the rings had been moved to some hands other than their father's and Konner's, but fingerprints would provide a definite identification. A bomb in the package would have been more welcome.

The rest of the night was a bad one for the Pugaliese family.

Beheaded of both its Don and his *consiglière* at the same time, the Jersey organization lay in a stunned shambles for days. On Frank Cataffo's advice the *commissione* did not press again for an appearance by Tony Pugaliese. Enough violence had been used to remove the major rebel, and he thought a lesson had been learned by the younger one, whom Denapole assured him would be unable to fill his father's shoes. So they waited to see if there would be any reaction from Jersey.

Tough Tony would not have agreed with Denapole's assessment of his abilities. He wanted to be the new Don. He talked about it with Little Julio.

"We can make it as a team, kid," he argued. "You got too much education to be tough enough to run the family,

but you'd be a hell of a good *consiglière*. How about it we take over together?"

Little Julio agreed with Denapole, but he did not want to fight his brother for the title. Tough Tony had so little imagination that he was as apt as not to go to fratricide.

"I've got a better idea," he said, and smiled. "You keep Jersey. I got my law office in Manhattan and Muro Ciaciocha disappeared the same day Dad and Konner did. Dad was talking to him about sounding out a peace meet with the *commissione*. I think he was included in the hit, you won't see him again. Which means Manhattan is fresh out of a Don. Maybe I can make a deal to step in there and make a marriage between our families. Between us we ought to be able to stand up to Denapole's gang."

Tony jumped at the bait but worried, "Then who do I get for an advisor?"

"We'll find one. And I'll help you establish yourself. You won't have it easy to begin. Your *sottocapo* thinks like a Moustache Pete and he blames you for bringing on our trouble, most of the lieutenants do. You'll have to do something to make them respect the name Pugaliese again."

"Like hitting Cataffo. That would do it quick."

Little Julio did not laugh at the clown, aloud. He appeared to think seriously about it. "Fine. If you could get to him. But you've got four families around him. Besides, I think you need something more positive. If you could break into that Big C chain, not wreck it but open the market for our oil again, get that money coming in, the rank and file soldiers would like that and the lieutenants would have to admit you've got the balls to be Don."

That posed a big problem for Tony. "If I don't wreck anything how do I bring them around?"

"Look at it from a business point of view. Clarence Howe is chairman of the board of Conglomerated Stores, but that doesn't mean he owns them. There are thousands of stockholders and they're the ones who get hurt when their property is destroyed, not Howe. He's hard-nosed and he feels safe because he's got a hell of a lot of money. You need to threaten him personally."

"Hit him, you mean?"

Little Julio was about ready to hit his stupid brother. And maybe he would if he got hold of the Manhattan family. If he controlled Manhattan it would make the Jersey family forgive his misfortune in the soap powder deal, then with Tony out of the way he could combine the two groups under his own domination. He said patiently, "No. You need him alive. He's your lever. He's got a granddaughter, a screwball militant radical, but he thinks a lot of her. She was out raising hell at Columbia when I was there. I knew her jerk husband. I met her once or twice."

Tony began to see the light. His pleasure showed in his face. "Sure . . . I call up Howe and tell him to do business or something happens to the chick."

"Do that and he'll whisk her out of the country so fast your head will spin. Keep thinking."

"I grab her first, then call him?"

"She lives in New York and we haven't got a man who'll go over there right now, and if we had, nobody would take your orders until you prove your right to give them."

"How you know where she lives?"

"Her name and picture were in the paper when Jason Dearborne was made President of Howe's stores. They're engaged."

"Well, hell," Tony swelled indignantly. "Why didn't you tell us about that before?"

"Kidnapping is a last resort today. I've been saving her."

"Shits. It's time I need her. I'll go get her myself."

"With the *commissione's* price on your head, which the Ciacioha people would love to collect to get back in favor?" Little Julio did not want his brother dead yet, not until he was settled in power across the river.

Tough Tony shrugged off the possibility, with the courage of the dull witted. "I'll take Amati to drive and stay down under a blanket. Where that kind of money lives the Ciacioha boys don't hang around anyway."

"All right," Little Julio at last agreed, "but remember you're no good to anyone dead."

sixteen

THE EVENING had been a disaster to Jay Jay Russo. He should have had better sense than to try to step out of his league. He was mad at Edy Bullock, mad at Clarence Howe, maddest at himself for accepting the invitation in the first place, mad that he had been trapped into it. He had been idiot enough to tell Jason Dearborne about the Sands Point tapes because Jason had been like the man in the hotel bed waiting for the second shoe to fall in the room above him. There had been an abrupt break off of the threatening phone calls and the attacks on Conglomerated, and Jay Jay had told him what it probably meant. Jason had wanted Howe to know, since the old man was equally under tension, and because Howe was under the weather with a cold and did not want to come to town, Jay Jay had agreed to go to Westchester. Edy had turned it into a dinner party.

Jay Jay felt uncomfortable the minute he drove into the estate. He knew intellectually that Howe was a multimillionaire, but as a man who had never made more than fifteen thousand a year the confrontation with the impressive grounds and magnificent house gave him an emotional jolt, an instinctive comparison of his walk-up apartment, a put down. He did not like the reaction and it was made worse when Howe, having listened to what he had come to

say, made the unfortunate quip that the mobsters seemed to be doing the FBI's job for them. He and Edy had quarreled all the way back to the city.

"You didn't have to be so damn snotty," she said. "And you didn't have to act the part of a dumb wop. My grandfather knows you went through Harvard Law School. You were an absolute prick. *Hidin' out in this boondock castle . . . seems like sorta a king lookin' down on the peasants that work for ya.*" She mimicked him with a scathing tone. "My grandfather knows every one of his managers not only by name, rank, and serial number, but also by his family history, wives, kids, and where he goes on vacation. *And* out of the side of that crooked mouth of yours yet. Oh. Do you know what he said to me after you said you had to go to the can?"

"I couldn't care less."

Why did they fight so? It seemed to him that she was always deliberately tempting him to hit her as he had that once. He had not done that again, yet he had to admit that she roused a filthy temper in him. He also admitted to himself that tonight he had acted like a small sulky boy. Why couldn't they behave like Jason and Mary Adams? The four of them had gone out together several times, and it was obvious that Jason would marry the girl after a seemly lapse of time since her late husband's death.

Aloud he said, "All right, I'm a louse, but goddammit the old man was giving me the business and you know it. He's pretty fair with the needle himself if you ask me."

"He was just testing you. That was plain enough. He wanted me to marry Jason and the switch shook him up. He was trying to find out what makes you tick."

"He's a goddamned Protestant snob is what he is. All those digs about the Pope and world population. What the hell, I don't run the Vatican. I'm a Catholic for the same reason you're a Methodist, because I was born one. I've got a cousin who's a priest and if Big Mama had had her way I'd be one too. But I'm not."

"Don't apologize for that."

"I'm not apologizing. I'm just thinking about it and knowing it won't work. I can hear your grandfather telling his cronies at the country club . . . *you know, my Edy*

married an Italian FBI agent. It's a cut above a uniformed cop, but . . . To hell with him . . . and you and the goddamned world. It can't work so let's forget it."

She sat rigid, crowded against the far door, staring straight ahead. At least she had finally shut up. He tramped on the accelerator, drove angrily down the West Side Highway, turned across town and threw her forward when he hit the brakes in front of her apartment. There was a car parked ahead of him and he nearly dinged its bumper.

She jarred back, opened the door, and twisted out to the sidewalk. "Don"t bother to come up."

"Don't be a complete fool. There was a mugging a block from here last week."

He got out and went around the car. He would see her inside, then the doorman could take over and be damned to it. But the doorman was not in his cubbyhole. Russo caught the automatic elevator as she tried to close the door in his face and they went up in frigid silence.

Inside her apartment Tough Tony heard the whirr of the ascending car. He did not know whether it was Edy Bullock coming home or someone else, but he signaled Amati to be ready. The little burglar took a post beside the door, holding the nylon rope loosely in both hands. The object was to get the rope around her neck before she could scream. They had taken care of the doorman, tied him up in the basement, and their car was out front. When she was unconscious they could walk her out between them like a drunk. Tony did not want her seriously hurt, he wanted her able to talk to her grandfather.

The elevator stopped, Russo slid the door back and Edy stalked out, Russo followed but stopped, holding the door open for his return ride. He wanted it plainly understood that he was not trying to get into the apartment. To hell with that. If he went in he knew exactly what would happen. No matter how savage their battles, their physical attraction for each other always overwhelmed them.

She did not even look at him. She went down the carpeted hall fumbling for her key, reached her door, jammed the key in the lock, and turned the knob. Not until then

did she look back at Russo, just before she stepped inside.

Tough Tony had made a serious mistake. He was reflected in the mirror above the lounge in the living room.

Wooden faced, Jay Jay Russo watched Edy unlock and open her door, then he took the step back into the elevator and reached for the first floor button. The elevator had not closed when he heard the scream, heard the apartment door slam, heard the scream cut short. He jumped for the hall, then stopped. It flashed through his mind that it was her trick to make him come to her. Then he ran, his footsteps muted by the thick carpet, pulling his automatic from the shoulder holster. With the momentum of his run he kicked the door at the level of the lock, heard the lock break, and went in using his shoulder as a ram.

Amati was burdened with the girl, fighting but already sinking toward the floor and unconsciousness. Russo went berserk, rushing on the burglar, slashing his gun barrel down on the upturned, amazed face, and the man dropped across the girl.

Tony, stupified for a second by the sudden entrance, cursed and rammed his hand into his pocket for his gun. He had got his fingers around it when Russo fired and the bullet went through his chest. Immense surprise spread over his heavy features. He took one step, still trying to aim through his pocket, and Russo shot him again. Tony fell forward, dead.

Russo knew he was dead and swung back to the burglar, booted the sprawled man off of the girl, dropped his gun in his pocket, lifted Edy, and placed her on the couch. The cord was still across her throat, but the ends were loose. She breathed with a rasp. Russo used the cord to tie Amati's hands and one leg behind him, then returned to the couch.

Edy's eyes opened wide, glazed with a horror that seemed to reach her in a delayed reaction, and then they focused on his face and she began to relax. The cord had left a red line, and her bruised throat muscles made her hoarse.

"What was it? Who were they? What did they want?"

"Don't talk. Lie quiet," he said, and went to roll Tough Tony onto his back. He had thought he recognized him, but in the fury of the moment he had not been sure. Now the still, coarse features showed him he was not mistaken.

"Robbers?" she said.

He came back, sat down, and took her hands. "Rest, I said. I think they meant to kidnap you. That one was the older Pugaliese son. I think they wanted you for hostage to break your grandfather and Jason . . . now just take it easy while I make some calls."

He phoned the local bureau first and told the man who answered to send someone to cover him with the Manhattan police, then he called the precinct station. Then he sat down beside her again, his legs and hands not steady with his own reaction.

"God. If I hadn't come up. If I hadn't waited."

She tried to sit up, rubbing her shoulders, groaning. "Have I ever got a stiff neck."

He pushed her back gently, bending to kiss her. "When you screamed I thought for a minute you were just trying to make me come in here. I almost pushed the down button."

"I don't blame you, as bitchy as I was. Russo, what's the matter with us?"

"We're in love. I knew it the second I saw that rope around your neck."

She smiled. He shook his head, not at her but at what he saw in the future.

"I don't know how it will work out—stormy, I suspect—but it should be exciting."

She brushed his face with her cheek. "Your mother doesn't like me."

"Your grandfather hates my guts. Maybe that's as it should be. I'm not marrying your family and you're not marrying mine."

"But will Big Mama let us take Jimmy away from her?"

Russo had not sorted it all out that far. "We'll take it step by step." The elevator door clanged and he got up and moved away from the couch.

Two prowl-car officers came through the broken door,

saw the figures on the floor, and moved their hands near their guns. One said, "What's going on here?" They watched him in open suspicion.

"Russo. FBI." Jay Jay reached without haste for his identification.

The officer was fast, taking out his gun. "Keep your hands in sight."

"My ID is in my breast pocket. Don't you want to see it?"

"All right, dig it out." But the officer did not holster his gun until his partner was satisfied that Russo was genuinely a member of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Then he said, "What's the story?"

"That hunk of meat was Tough Tony Pugaliese from New Jersey. He and the other punk tried to kidnap Mrs. Bullock. I was in the hall and heard her scream."

The officers became more friendly. They admired the corpse and the unconscious, trussed-up burglar. No one made any move to touch either until two precinct detectives came in with a photographer and a fingerprint man. None of them exactly took Russo to their bosoms.

Mac Doyle of the Bureau arrived, and Russo was very glad to see him. He knew there would be a hearing. Even when an agent killed in the line of duty, there had to be a hearing.

The burglar stirred, groaned, and fought the cord. A precinct detective untied him, jerked him to his feet, and fired questions at him but got no answers. Russo, a dogged student of the Pugaliese family, flipped the album of mugg shots through his memory and finally made him.

"His name is Marcus Amati," he told the detective. "His rap sheet carries seven arrests for burglary, one for armed robbery."

The little man sneered. "I ain't never took a fall."

"You're taking one now," Russo said. "Attempted murder or attempted kidnaping. Maybe both."

The little man raised a sullen glare to Russo's face. "Whassamatter, Guinea? You against your own kind?"

That was one too many too close to home for the night. Russo's fist caught him on the chin, tore him loose from

the detective and sent him backpeddling, bumping against the wall, sliding down it. Russo started after him, saying in a tight voice,

"You scum. I am not your kind and every decent Italian will cheer every time one of you hoodlums takes a fall."

The detective grabbed his shoulder and held him. "Hey, lay off. We take him in all marked up and some mouthpiece screams po-lice brutality."

Russo breathed heavily through his nose until he had control again, then nodded a thanks to the detective and went to stand over the burglar.

"For two cents I'd kick your ribs in. Answer me. Is the Bag Man dead?"

Amati's hurt jaw made talking hard. "I don't know nothing about it."

"Sure he's dead." Russo spoke through closed teeth. "He was a dumb greaseball but he wouldn't have tried a caper as stupid as this. Tony wouldn't have dared either if the old man was still around."

Two men from the meat wagon arrived, and the electricity in the room subsided. They carried out Tony's body, the detectives marched Amati out, and the rest of the crowd departed in their own time, Mac Doyle last, after a private word with Russo. Russo was then able to get back to Edy, sitting in unaccustomed silence and humility.

"You can't stay here tonight. I'll take you to my place until we find another apartment. With a blind phone."

"Your mother?"

"My mother is going to have to get used to you sometime. As well now as later."

She stood up and he took her in his arms and held her tightly, gratefully, for a long while.

No reference to the Federal Bureau of Investigation appeared in the newspaper story. Politically, Russo and Doyle told the local police to take the credit as a way of keeping themselves less visible. From Russo's apartment Edy Bullock called her grandfather to warn him that she would probably make the front page and assure him that

she was all right and in safe hands, and Clarence Howe was effusively grateful to Jay Jay. Both men apologized for their earlier behavior. In all of the confusion nobody remembered Jason Dearborne. Jason read over his morning coffee:

CLARENCE HOWE GRANDDAUGHTER VICTIM OF KIDNAP ATTEMPT

He skimmed the column in a fright, phoned Edy's empty apartment, and then called Russo at home to find out if he had seen the paper. Russo reassured him and Jason sat silent, holding the open phone, trying to make his heart quiet down for so long that Russo said, "You still there? You all right?"

"Yes to both questions," Jason said in a limp voice, then added, "Come over and see me, will you. Something has got to be done to stop this thing. Maybe if we talk about some positive move instead of waiting here like sitting ducks. . . ."

Russo made Jason's office by mid-afternoon in a mind to call his attention to the positive headway the Task Force had already made against the corruption in New Jersey politics, but admittedly on the defensive that no one had been able to protect Conglomerated Stores.

Jason said that he hadn't meant to cast stones. To the agent there was a different look about the president of Big C, a subtle change from the near deferential manner by which Dearborne had accepted Russo's greater knowledgeability in the criminal area. He was an austere figure, prowling the office, using his feet as if he were wading through something ankle deep and toeing it out of his path. His light gray eyes held a hard glitter, as sharp as an accountant's pencil. His voice was empty of expression, with no betrayal of emotion for a listener to take hold of. A banker refusing someone's third plea for a loan.

"I start with the assumption that the Pugaliese outfit may be temporarily crippled but cannot be considered permanently out of business," he said. "There is still the younger son who could conceivably assume control. There are lieutenants whose ability I don't know anything about.

The one, Johnny Dee, we do know something of. From a businessman's point of view, he can be judged as unsuccessful. We unwittingly bought the oil he was selling and would have continued to do so if he had not been careless enough to let the Wades deliver to us a product so obviously beneath the quality standard we could accept. If the sample quality had been maintained we might have been in very deep before we became aware how we were being used. So as I see it he has a weakness that might be exploited. You do know where to find him?" He looked at Russo with a gimlet penetration.

Jay Jay Russo nodded without interrupting, wondering at this new person. In their earlier acquaintance he had sensed that this man could be a hard bargainer in his own field and he thought that he was looking at some of that capability now. He was fascinated.

Jason said without emphasis, "What would happen if Johnny Dee broke the rule of Omerta, told some of the things he knows?"

"He'd be killed."

"If he did not, but his family believed he had?"

"Same thing. But whatever he could tell would not be enough to give us the proof we need on his higher-ups to nail them. People like him are told only so much, deliberately, for that very reason."

Jason's smile was as thin as a pen line drawn through a contract clause. "Let's not abandon Dee quite yet. I'm thinking of an action Howie told me about, that he was in some years back. There was a group of stores independently owned, none of them making much of a profit, some were in very bad shape. The owners got together and came to Howie, wanting to sell him all the stores as a package. Howie wanted the stores, but he thought the price they asked was too high. They wouldn't open their books to him individually but they showed him a statement covering the entire group. Howie didn't believe it. He couldn't tell whether some of the owners were lying to the others as to their profits, trying to unload a store near bankruptcy under the umbrella of the group, or whether it was a joint conspiracy, sort of a conglomerate raid in reverse. They wouldn't talk to him separately. Howie didn't turn them

down flat, he played them along, making counter offers, which they would not accept. And he poked around, sent people who knew marketing and management to visit the stores and make educated guesses on how each was doing. He chose the best of the bunch and laid out a campaign to investigate it. He ran down some of their suppliers and bribed . . . yes . . . out of them the state of the store's accounts. It was in debt but not strapped. Then he sent spotters to watch its prices and volume of trade. He got a pretty good picture of what that one store was worth. Then he gave a story to the business editor of the local paper that he had agreed to buy that single store . . . for half again its value."

Jason at last sat down across from Russo with a speculative tilt to his head.

"The group thought this owner of the best store had sold them out and they turned on him, cut him out of their united front, came to Howe and said that if he would agree not to buy that store the rest of them would sell to him at a lot less than the original asking price. He said no, and they broke apart in a squabble, and Howe bought them all one at a time for less than his lowest offer.

"Do you see a parallel with our present need of leverage?"

"Sure. Divide and conquer. You've got some idea, I suppose?"

"Could you take Johnny Dee before a grand jury? A closed one?"

Jay Jay Russo gave him an unenthusiastic smile. "Then leak it that Johnny had talked? That's an elaborate way to get him killed."

"Not, I think, before his bosses had made him tell them all he had said to the jury. Wouldn't all the families, not just the Pugaliese, be interested, just in case Dee had known something incriminating?"

"Make him the bird dog to flush them, you mean?" It could work." Russo raised his eyes over Jason's head, to the empty corner of the ceiling, an agent's dream appearing there. "What a beautiful irony, if the *Cosa Nostra's* greatest single strength, its blood oath of silence, turned

out to be the link that breaks, that pulls some of them down." The satyr face began to take on a swelling pleasure. "It just might work . . . Damn . . . Jason, I wish the Bureau could afford to pay your salary."

seventeen

IN THE MONTH since Julio Pugaliese's disappearance and the two weeks following Tough Tony's death, Johnny Dee was like a tramp dog that had lost first its master and then the comfort of its familiar neighborhood. The power struggle in the family was turning everything upside down, all the lieutenants jockeying for position, even Little Julio trying to make himself Don. Only the *sottocapo*, believeing that the forces behind Frank Cataffo were not finished with their war against the New Jersey organization and that they were too strong to fight, bowed out hastily. He turned up in Tucson and sent word from there that he had no intention of ever entering the east again.

Ordinarily in such a struggle Johnny Dee would have entered the lists himself, but his failure to handle the soap powder and olive oil wedges into Big C made him suspect as a potential leader. He had approached Little Julio with an offer to support him in exchange for a raise in rank to *consiglière* but the lawyer had turned him down. The last thing he needed, Little Julio yelled at him, was a *consiglière* as clumsy as that fat slob.

Dee retreated to the D & D Sales Agency to try to puzzle out a course for himself. His numbers runners were out like squirrels establishing banks of their own. He still had his shylocking, but the bookies and tavern owners were

suddenly very reluctant to make their payments, and he did not have the muscle now to force them.

A little, insignificant man came into the office, coughed, and said, "John Dee?"

On any normal day Johnny would make sure who was asking before he identified himself, but his mind was deep in his problems and he simply nodded.

"Present for you," the man said, pushed a paper into his hands and was out the door before Johnny Dee could unfold it.

What he read was a subpoena ordering him to appear before the special grand jury sitting in Newark.

Johnny blew up, ranting around the office, throwing a paperweight, an ink pad, ash trays, everything his hands touched. But he answered the subpoena. He did not want a contempt citation.

He appeared before the jury coached by the nationally prominent attorney whom the family kept on retainer, paid for out of the fund for the protection of its members. Robert Maxwell, a Task Force ape, interrogated him between whisperings with a wop fink beside him. They got nothing. Johnny Dee took the Fifth on every question. After a four-hour grilling he walked jauntily out of the courthouse highly pleased with himself. They couldn't touch him. He felt, in fact, better than he had at any time since the Bag Man had not come home. He felt fine until the next morning's paper came out. Then he read the *Newark Journal* headline and his hair stood on end. It screamed incredibly:

LOAN SHARK BREAKS RULE OF SILENCE
JOHNNY DEE TESTIFIES BEFORE GRAND JURY

In a closed hearing yesterday, the printing ran, *Johnny Dee, alleged to be a lieutenant of the Pugaliese family which is allegedly a* Cosa Nostra *organization headquartered in Delaware County, testified for four hours.*

J.J. Russo, in charge of the local FBI office, and Robert Maxwell, head of the Special Task

Force authorized by the Justice Department to fight organized crime in this area, told reporters Dee's testimony represented a major breakthrough. Mr. Maxwell says he is confident that the jury will hand down indictments naming several men alleged to be among the most powerful criminals in this and our neighboring state. . . .

There was more to the story but the words blurred before Johnny Dee's eyes. He could read no further. He stood on the sidewalk in front of the small cigar store around the corner from his apartment and his wheezing was so heavy that passersby paused to see if he was having a heart attack before hurrying on out of range of becoming involved.

"Liars." He said it aloud but the word was so thick it could not be understood. "They're cops, how can they say such crap."

But it was an academic question. How was not important. The Dons would believe them no matter how loud Johnny Dee shouted the truth. He was marked for death all across the country, just as fast as the story traveled.

Shaking and sweating, Johnny Dee dodged around the corner for cover, then stopped short. The apartment would be the first place they would look for him. The Pugaliese house . . . hell, they'd love to have him run there, right into their guns. The same with the motel. Where could he find any safety? Everywhere he thought to turn he could see executioners.

He thought of The Tavern. It was closed, empty, but he had a key. If he could make it there he could hole up until night and then try to get out of the country. That would take more money than he had on him, so he would have to risk going to the apartment. There in a hidden panel behind the old-fashioned claw foot bathtub he had maybe twenty thousand dollars in cash. He looked quickly at the people on the street but none of them were now paying him any attention. He hurried to the building, sweated out the elevator ride, and reached his apartment safely. When he left it fifteen minutes later he wore a comfortable

money belt that added considerably to his quaking girth. He took a taxi belonging to a company not controlled by the family, and told the driver to pick him up again where it dropped him, at nine that night.

Frederico Denapole never got up before noon, but on this morning his bedside phone woke him early, and Vito Antonucci's rasp rattled loud against his ear.

"You see the papers yet?"

Groggy and sour at being disturbed, Denapole said, "What the hell papers you mean?"

"Newspapers. Pugaliese's fink Johnny Dee spilled to the grand jury."

Denapole lay very still, suddenly wide awake. "What did he say?"

"Dunno. The hearing was closed. But FBI gave it out they'll get a lot of indictments. I'll send a crew across the river, put up twenty grand if you'll match it."

"Let's make it a hundred. But I want him alive. Let's find out who he fingered before we hit him. I'll call Frank."

He hung up and phoned Cataffo. As *Capo di tutti capi* he should be the one to offer the reward.

Jay Jay Russo phoned Dearborne's office just as Jason walked in and paused at Tinker's desk to tell her to call the FBI agent. He took the call at his own desk, sitting down to try to quiet the pounding of his pulse. He had never before watched someone deliberately made a target for murder, and in spite of his conviction that Dee was highly expendable he felt a chilling guilt.

"You beat me by half a minute," he told Russo. "I just read your bomb on the way here. Where is Dee now?"

Russo sounded as mild as milk. "Your bomb, thank you. Johnny has just gone to ground. At the moment he's hiding in The Tavern, which Pugaliese closed sometime back. I imagine he'll try to get out of the country tonight."

"You think he can?"

"No. The mobs will have the waterfront sewed up tighter than a mouth full of alum, and the airports and the railroad stations."

"Won't he know that? Won't he drive?"

"He may. If he does the police will throw up roadblocks any way he goes and turn him back. He's boxed."

"You're not afraid he might just be killed on sight?"

"Not afraid. The tapes on Cataffo's phone tell us he's to be taken there for questioning. We'll be there, wait until they've had time to rough him up, then raid the place and bag the lot of them. If they've killed him we'll have an open and shut case of murder. If they mean to take him somewhere else for the hit we'll have them on kidnapping, assault, conspiracy to murder. We've got one dividend already. Fred Denapole phoned Little Julio Pugaliese and offered to call off the war if the Jersey family would open its territory so the others could look for Dee over there. Little Julio said he'd cooperate any way he could and that he was already looking. He said he'd even pay the fine the *commissione* had wanted to levy against Tony if he could safely go to Sands Point to hear what Dee had to say and be in on the execution. Denapole told him welcome aboard. So he'll be added to the catch."

"God." Dearborne thought he would gag. "How can you sound so calm? My stomach is tied in knots just thinking about all of it."

"You've got lots of company. Maybe you'd feel better if you came over here and sweat it out with the rest of us."

"Thanks," Jason said. "It might ease up the pressure to follow the moves. I'm just not trained for this kind of thing."

"Tell you a secret." Russo gave him a half laugh. "It's no great pleasure to any of us. It takes a brute mind to enjoy action like this."

Jason hung up and left his office. "I don't know when I'll be back," he told Tinker. "If you have to reach me I'll be in Maxwell's office, but don't call me unless it's urgent."

The command post was a place of wearing boredom throughout the day, the waiting punctuated only by predictable reports like sheet lightning that presages the breaking of a gathering storm. The mobs' button men ranging on their manhunt kept phoning Cataffo's, increasingly uneasy and frustrated at not locating the fat man.

The agents watching The Tavern called in periodically to say that Dee had not showed himself since he entered the building. Russo and Maxwell tried to relieve Jason's tension by playing cards, simple games that took no concentration. No one went out to eat. They had bland, easily digestable food brought in and made tea on the hot plate as being more soothing than coffee. In the afternoon the two agents took turns napping. Jason was jealous of the ease with which both men dropped off to sound sleep. Even though they gave him a light sedative he had trouble resting, but Russo insisted, warning him that the night would be a long and grueling one.

They had a single drink and a broiled steak at eight in the evening. It was an hour later and heavy dark when the signal came. The agent who had watched the rear of The Tavern since noon reported a taxi pulling up at the door and Johnny Dee scrambling into it. Maxwell alerted the unmarked radio cars waiting on each of the access streets and the taxi was followed discreetly, three cars leapfrogging, two frequently turning off at intersections for short detours to lessen the chance of their being spotted.

"Looks like he's heading for Newark Airport," came the voice from one car.

"Keep on him," Maxwell said, then he called the agent waiting near an airport phone tagged out of order. "Post your people," he said. "He's on his way."

Johnny Dee was on his way, but not toward the commercial airline counters. He headed for a hangar that chartered small planes. He knew that *Cosa Nostra* soldiers would be at the mouseholes of the main gates, but if he could get a charter to Montreal or Quebec he might make it across the Atlantic. A major decision had taken root in him through the day. If he could reach England or France, by God, he would contact the American embassy there and make a deal to do just what the fink Russo had accused him of, spill his guts in a trade for immunity from a death penalty charge and for protection from his friends.

Among the many things that Johnny had never been told about the web of his old Don's acquisitions was that Julio Pugaliese had owned the charter company. He had kept it as a handy escape route for such members of his

family as sometimes needed a quick vacation away from the area. All Johnny Dee knew was that he had money enough to hire a plane from a private flight service.

Johnny stopped his taxi at an out-of-the-way drugstore, looked up the number and called, asking the manager to have a Cessna warmed up and a pilot ready to fly him out, he would say where when he got there. The manager agreed and broke the connection, gave the phone a friendly pat and dialed the Pugaliese house. Julio answered.

"Hubert at Newark," the manager said. "He just phoned for a plane. I'll stall him until the boys get here."

He did not have to stall. Two family men were already in the main building, a third covering a pay phone. When Dee's cab rolled up beside the plane and Johnny got out they moved in on three sides of him.

"Hello, Johnny. The *commissione* is waiting for you at the table."

Maxwell got the flash from the car closest behind Johnny's cab. The men in it had witnessed the pick-up from the road outside the gateway to the hangar.

"They've got him."

"Good. Stay with them until you're certain they're going to Cataffo's."

Maxwell was already certain, barring some fluke such as the Pugaliese family deciding to take its revenge independently, though he did not believe they would be that stupid. All day he had been apprised as one Don and then another arrived at the estate beside the Sound. His plans were drawn, his trap was set. All that was needed was the certainty that the bait would arrive as scheduled.

When he had that assurance he took the time to relieve his people and the police stationed at other possible routes of exit. It would take him an hour and a half to drive to Cataffo's place. The delay at the command post plus the captive's head start should give the Dons plenty of room to grill the man.

Russo asked Jason if he wanted to bow out on the rest of the night. Jason said no, he wanted to see the job through. He rode with Russo and Maxwell and two emergency cars followed.

By the time they reached the estate the rest of the cars were in place. They were not using police, some of whom had mob connections and could be expected to warn the Dons. Russo said that more than a hundred agents had been called in from distant assignments to engage in this raid. It would be one of the largest since the Apalachin meeting, for this was the second time so many heads of leading families would be taken into custody.

Maxwell's car led the three that advanced on the gate and Russo used a bull horn through the window.

"Open up. This is the FBI."

No answer came. There was movement in the dark yard, men silhouetted against the floodlights that protected the house from unseen approach, running toward the door to give the alarm to those inside.

Maxwell told his driver, "Push it down."

The gate was locked but not chained for the night. The driver moved the bumper against the wrought ironwork, then fed the motor quick and sustained power. The rear wheels spun, burning rubber. The gate held. The driver backed five feet, said, "Hang on," and rammed the barricade. This time the lock snapped and the fenders butted the wings aside.

Maxwell's car sped toward the house and those behind roared through, the second one stopping to block the gateway. In a ring surrounding the three-acre estate searchlights mounted atop cars blazed on, one man being left in each car for that purpose. A ladder stile was thrown over the high fence where the bulk of the agents were gathered and they came across like a troop of monkeys. The glare of light picked out men rushing from the house, running toward the rear fence line and escape through the service gate there. The agents turned them back and herded them into the big front living room, and a circle of men surrounded the house, watching windows and doors, bottling up those inside.

The agents who entered the house swept through it from attic to cellar, gathering the mobsters they found hiding in some of the rooms, prodding everyone into the front room. It made a crowd: furniture was overturned, glasses

lay shattered across the floor, crunching under hurrying feet. On a large bar bottles were knocked over, spilling liquor in spreading puddles on the carpet.

There were over fifty men in sight, almost half of them mobsters. For the first time in his life Jason Dearborne knowingly looked at the face of the underworld. Some of them were prototypes that he could identify but others could be mistaken for bankers, lawyers, businessmen, even federal agents, except that they had no guns in their hands. The one distinguishing feature was that the captives were being lined up around the walls and searched. There were few weapons found on them, most of the hardware had been hurriedly tossed behind couches and chairs or out of windows. Two agents collected the pieces in the house into a bag, then went outside to search through the shrubbery near the walls. As the underlings were disarmed they were marched out to the cars. Within half an hour only four Dons and Frank Cataffo were left. Cataffo looked to Jason like an evangelist, or retired minister, or a college president. Not a one of them had spoken.

Maxwell showed his warrant to each in turn, and then they were marched out individually, except Cataffo, whom Russo wanted detained longer. Russo had a disappointed twist to his mouth.

"Where," he asked the *Capo di tutti capi*, "Is Little Julio Pugaliese? He was supposed to be with you."

The ministerial figure looked through him blankly. "Never heard of him."

Jason thought the New Jersey gangster might have shown some intelligence, had a change of mind about putting his head into this lion's mouth, joining these men who had done away with his father so recently. In the same position, Jason decided, he would not have been that trusting either. But he knew that Russo wanted that one gangster more than any other. Jay Jay did not press the question. He said, "Where is Johnny Dee? We know you people picked him up at Newark airport and brought him here."

Cataffo's empty expression did not change in the least. Again he said, "Never heard of him."

Russo continued to stand in front of him, staring bleak-

ly as though he could reach into the gangster's mind for the information. An agent came through the door, waited until Russo looked toward him, then shook his head.

"Didn't find him."

Maxwell said in a sharp tone, "You made a thorough search?"

"Attic to cellars, garages, grounds. He isn't here."

Russo's lips pulled back from his teeth in an outright snarl but his eyes kept boring at Cataffo. "He has to be." He spoke to the agent. "Our tail saw him brought in. He could not have gotten away. Go over the grounds again, the gardens, look for a place where the earth has been disturbed. Look in the incinerator."

The agent went out and Russo flicked a hand at Cataffo, said to Maxwell, "Hold the fort, I'm going to have a look."

He started toward the stairs in the hallway. Jason fell in beside him and thought Russo did not even know it, so deep was his concentration on this unexpected turn.

They went first to the attic, opened trunks and boxes, then to the bedrooms where Russo looked inside closets, banged against the walls listening for hollow sounds that would betray a space behind them, studied the architecture to judge where there would be room for such a disguised space. He looked under beds and in the drawers of chests. At that Jason let a short laugh come.

"How much did you say he weighed? You think he'd fit in those?"

The canted mouth did not smile and Russo kept on opening drawers. He said flatly, "Pieces of him could."

"Oh."

They returned to the ground floor, went through the long dining room to the kitchen, then to the basement. There was no sign of the fat man, whole or dismembered.

"Hell," said Russo. "He's got to be here someplace. Maybe there's a secret room down here."

Jason walked into the open pantry. It was very large and stocked as if Cataffo expected to stand a siege. At the back of it was the heavy, varnished wooden door of a walk-in refrigerator with a light switch beside it. Jason

went to it and reached for the switch, flicking it up. Russo snapped his fingers sharply, came up with long, fast steps and brushed Jason's fingers away from the handle.

"Take a walk. You won't like this."

He opened the door far enough to slip inside, but the door swung wider on its own. Cold air came out in frosty smoke, not too thick to see through. Jason wanted to turn away but his feet would not obey and he stood just outside the door, staring in.

Carcasses of beef, lamb, pork hung on meat hooks suspended from a trolley at one side. Russo went down the row without looking back. Jason saw one hog near the far end that hung askew, the stiff, splayed legs protruding out from the line of others. Then Jay Jay Russo's big body blocked the view. He put his arms around the animal lifted, twisted, and dropped it to the floor. It was a heavy, clumsy load and Russo bent somewhat in handling it. Jason had his first look at Johnny Dee. It was a brief glimpse before Russo straightened again but it was enough. The after image stayed with Jason and would stay for the rest of his life.

The fat body hung as naked as the other meat, with great masses of discolored, gashed and burned flesh hanging from chest, belly, arms, thighs, legs. The iron hook entered under his chin and came out through his mouth, the angle of the pull of his weight forcing the head back and the mouth wide open. It gave tthe impression that he was screaming.

The combined load of man and hog had partially straightened the steel crook. Without warning the body moved, slipped off and fell. It landed on its feet and toppled, already stiff from the refrigeration. Jay Jay Russo jumped back to avoid being knocked over, looked at it a moment longer, then turned on his heel on the sawdust floor. He saw Jason, his face bloodless, seeming to be paralyzed and went to him and gently forced him out of the doorway and closed the door behind him. Jason felt as cold as the corpse as they went back upstairs.

In the living room where two agents and Maxwell still held Cataffo, the hard faced, unblinking gangster moved his eyes as Jason followed Russo through the swinging

kitchen door. The eyes were opaque marbles, showing nothing, but one corner of the thick upper lip twitched in a sneer at Jason's pallor, then went stiff again.

Jay Jay walked to him slowly, his hands balled at his sides and the desire to use his fists on the man was plain.

Maxwell said, "No. I take it you found him."

Russo stopped, drew in a long breath, and fought his fire with fire, called barbarism a barbaric joke, told Maxwell, "Your evidence is on ice. Look down in the butcher shop."

While Maxwell was gone Russo borrowed a set of cuffs from the nearest agent, fastened one side to the agent's wrist, the other to Cataffo's.

"*Capo di tutti capi* of *Cosa Nostra*," he said, then repeated it.

Maxwell and Russo delivered Cataffo personally. Jason rode in front with Russo driving, Maxwell sat beside the gangster in the rear. They were flanked ahead and behind by cars of agents, prepared for an unlikely attempt at rescue by button men who might somehow have heard of the raid. It was full morning when they drove back to the command post where Jason had left his car. He had overcome his shock enough to talk almost normally, even tried a congratulating laugh.

"This ought to go down as a record night's work for you. Four Dons and their big Boss, more than twenty soldiers."

"But not Little Julio," Russo said. "The rest are Maxwell's, I wanted the Pugaliese. I still want him."

"You've got the tape of him talking to Denapole," Jason said. "Can't you use that?"

"It's not enough even if a court admitted it. He and his lawyers would yell fake, frameup, and there's no way we can prove different. Well, maybe another time. . . ."

"At least you put a big dent in the other families around here."

Russo grunted. "Next week there will be four new Dons and, when they need one, a new boss. We haven't stopped them and we won't. Not until every man, woman, and child in this world is incorruptible. And when that happens it won't be this world, it will be heaven."

eighteen

SATURDAY MORNINGS Jay Jay Russo liked to lie late abed and enjoy a leisurely love making. This day the phone rang even before he was awake. He groaned in rebellion, opened one eye to see the face of the clock on the night table, and swore at the noise.

"Who the devil would call practically before daylight? Eight o'clock, and I'm on vacation."

His wife stretched like a waking cat, bent over him and bit his ear, not gently. "You might find out if you answer it."

"Hell with it." He rolled over to face her, ran a hand up her warm body, and nuzzled into her throat. The phone rang for the third time.

Edy Russo moved quickly, slid from under the cover before he got a firm grip on her thigh, and ran to the phone in the apartment hall. Howie was sick, a nurse staying with him, and she was afraid to let the call go.

Russo watched her through the door she left open, naked and dancing with the chill that followed her from the bedroom, and was well pleased with what he saw. He heard her anxious hello, then a relieved change of voice.

"Oh, how are you? No, we're not busy, that would be fun. Really? Yes, I'll go get it."

She came back, stopped at her closet, and began putting

on slacks and a blouse. Her voice was muffled within the cloth. "That was Mary Dearborne. They want us for dinner, and Jason says tell you there's a story in the paper that will surprise you. I'll go down and get it."

"It'll keep. Come on back here."

She made a face at him and went off, came back and dumped the *Times* on the bed, spread the front page between them and tried to read it upside down. Russo propped himself on one elbow, scanned the headlines, and found one midway of the page, not of major emphasis.

"Well, well, well, well," he said and drew a finger down the column ahead of his reading.

"Lawrence Wade shoots attorney?" Edy said. "Who's he?"

He finished and looked up at her with that twisted grin that always got to her.

"You remember when the underworld tried to muscle in on the Big C about six months before we were married . . ."

"How could I forget, that's how I met you."

". . . and two soap manufacturers disappeared? Larry Wade was one of them. Listen." He reread aloud. "Yesterday afternoon Lawrence Wade walked into the Madison Avenue office of attorney Julio Pugaliese, son of Julio Pugaliese, Senior, who is believed to have been head of the New Jersey Mafia family, and fired three shots into the lawyer, killing him. Wade then gave himself up to police, saying that he was convinced Pugaliese had been behind a gangster named Johnny Dee and that Dee had been responsible for the presumed murder of Wade's cousin Frank Wade and Frank Wade's wife. Johnny Dee was . . . and so forth. Well, thank you, Larry Wade, you stupid dope."

Abruptly Russo swept the papers to the floor, lunged, and caught his wife by one arm, grinning at her.

"End of Pugaliese story. Now, woman, peel those clothes off and wake me up the right way."

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